VOICES OF THE POOR
Crying Out for Change

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Dedication

We dedicate this book to
the more than 20,000 poor women, men, youth and children
who took the time to share their lives with us.
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Foreword

This book is the second in a three-part series entitled *Voices of the Poor*. The series is based on an unprecedented effort to gather the views, experiences, and aspirations of more than 60,000 poor men and women from 60 countries. The work was undertaken for the *World Development Report 2000/2001* on the theme of poverty and development.

*Crying Out for Change* brings together the voices of over 20,000 poor men and women from comparative fieldwork conducted in 1999 in 23 countries. The first volume in the series—*Can Anyone Hear Us?*—brings together the voices of over 40,000 poor people from 50 countries from studies conducted in the 1990s. The final volume, *From Many Lands*, highlights country case studies and regional patterns. The *Voices of the Poor* project is different from all other large-scale poverty studies. Using participatory and qualitative research methods, the study presents very directly, through poor people's own voices, the realities of their lives. How do poor people view poverty and wellbeing? What are their problems and priorities? What is their experience with the institutions of the state, markets, and civil society? How are gender relations faring within households and communities? We want to thank the project team led by Deepa Narayan of the Poverty Group in the World Bank, and particularly the country research teams, for undertaking this work.

What poor people share with us is sobering. A majority of them feel they are worse off and more insecure than in the past. Poor people care about many of the same things all of us care about: happiness, family, children, livelihood, peace, security, safety, dignity, and respect. Poor people’s descriptions of encounters with a range of institutions call out for all of us to rethink our strategies. From the perspective of poor people, corruption, irrelevance, and abusive behavior often mar the formal institutions of the state. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), too, receive mixed ratings from the poor. Poor people would like NGOs to be accountable to them. Poor people’s interactions with traders and markets are stamped with their powerlessness to negotiate fair prices. How then do poor people survive? They turn to their informal networks of family, kin, friends, and neighbors. But these are already stretched thin.

We commend to you the authenticity and significance of this work. What can be more important than listening to the poor and working with our partners all over the world to respond to their concerns? Our core mission is to help poor people succeed in their own efforts, and the book raises major challenges to both of our institutions and to all of us concerned about poverty. We are prepared to hold ourselves accountable, to make the effort to try to respond to these voices. Obviously we cannot do this alone. We urge you to
read this book, to reflect and respond. Our hope is that the voices in this book will call you to action as they have us.

CLARE SHORT,  
Secretary of State for International Development, U.K.

JAMES D. WOLFENSOHN,  
President, World Bank
Poverty is like heat:
you cannot see it, you can only feel it;
so to know poverty you have to go through it.

—A poor man, Adaboya, Ghana
Chapter 1

Perspectives of the Poor

Summary

This book is based on the realities of poor people. It draws upon research conducted in 1999 involving over 20,000 poor women and men from 23 countries. Despite very different political, social and economic contexts, there are striking similarities in poor people's experiences. The common theme underlying poor people's experiences is one of powerlessness. Powerlessness consists of multiple and interlocking dimensions of illbeing or poverty. The organization of this book roughly follows the 10 dimensions of powerlessness and illbeing that emerge from the study. The remainder of the chapter presents the methodology and the challenges faced in conducting the study.
Introduction

Nobody hears the poor. It is the rich who are being heard.
—Participant, discussion group of men and women, Borg Meghezel, Egypt

When they assist you they treat you like a beggar.
—Participant, discussion group of men and women, Vila Junqueira, Brazil

There are 2.8 billion poverty experts, the poor themselves. Yet the development discourse about poverty has been dominated by the perspectives and expertise of those who are not poor—professionals, politicians and agency officials. This book seeks to reverse this imbalance by focusing directly on the perspectives and expertise of poor people. It is based on a study that used open-ended participatory methods to engage more than 20,000 poor women and men from 23 countries to express their own perspectives and experiences of poverty, its causes and how it can be reduced.¹

From poor people's perspectives, illbeing or bad quality of life is much more than just material poverty. It has multiple, interlocking dimensions. The dimensions combine to create and sustain powerlessness, a lack of freedom of choice and action. Each dimension can cause or compound the others. Not all apply all the time or in every case, but many apply much of the time. For those caught in multiple deprivations, escape is a struggle. To describe this trap poor people use the metaphor of bondage, of slavery, of being tied like bundles of straw. The psychological experience of multiple deprivations is intense and painful. Ten interlocking dimensions of powerlessness and illbeing emerge from poor people's experiences:

- Livelihoods and assets are precarious, seasonal and inadequate.
- Places of the poor are isolated, risky, unserviced and stigmatized.
- The body is hungry, exhausted, sick and poor in appearance.
- Gender relations are troubled and unequal.
- Social relations are discriminating and isolating.
- Security is lacking in the sense of both protection and peace of mind.
- Behaviors of those more powerful are marked by disregard and abuse.
- Institutions are disempowering and excluding.
- Organizations of the poor are weak and disconnected.
- Capabilities are weak because of the lack of information, education, skills and confidence.

These 10 dimensions of powerlessness and illbeing are examined in the chapters that follow; they form the core organizational structure of the book.
This chapter describes the origins of the study, the methodology and some of the challenges faced, and chapter 2 explores in some detail the multidimensional nature of wellbeing and illbeing. Chapters 3–11 then address the core findings. Chapter 3 focuses on poor people’s livelihoods and coping strategies as well as their limited assets. Chapter 4 describes the places where poor people live and work, and how the lack of infrastructure and services adds to their disempowerment and difficulties. Chapter 5 focuses on the body as poor people’s most valuable and sometimes only asset; it includes a discussion of the many different forms of social exclusion. Chapter 6 explores the many meanings of insecurity and related fears and anxieties experienced by poor men and women. Chapter 9 details the behavior and character of institutions, both the qualities cherished by poor people in institutions with which they have contact and the quality of their interaction with these institutions. Chapter 10 describes the most important institutions in poor people’s lives and their ratings of effective and ineffective institutions. Chapter 11 brings these dimensions together into a many-stranded web of powerlessness. It particularly focuses on the lack of capability, including lack of information, education, skills and confidence that together with all the other deprivations contribute to poor people’s powerlessness. The final chapter is a call to action and dwells on the challenge of change.

**Origin of the Study**

The *Voices of the Poor* study, also known as the *Consultations with the Poor* study, was undertaken by the World Bank as background for the *World Development Report 2000/01: Attacking Poverty (WDR 2000/01)* and to inform poverty reduction strategies. Its origins lie in the conviction that at the start of the 21st century any policy document on poverty should be based on the experiences, reflections, aspirations and priorities of poor people themselves. The aim of the study was to enable a wide range of poor people—women and men, young and old—in diverse countries and conditions to share their views in such a way that they could inform and contribute to the concepts and content of the WDR 2000/01.

**The Study Process**

The idea of a participatory poverty study to inform the WDR 2000/01 emerged in the summer of 1998. It became immediately clear that something like this had never been attempted before. It was also clear that such a study would have to be done on a fairly large scale and completed quickly if it was to inform the WDR 2000/01. Planning the study brought out many tensions and differences: between those who thought the study should be done in great depth in four to six countries and those who thought the study should be done in at least 20 countries; between carrying
out an analysis of existing data and conducting new studies; between using participatory open-ended methods and pre-coded questionnaires; and between a more flexible research design that gave freedom to country researchers to choose issues and participatory methods and more standardization of the methodology.

An Evolving Framework

The methodological discussions engaged staff within the World Bank and researchers in civil society. Three methodological workshops were held in August and December 1998 and in January 1999. The framework for the study evolved during these meetings. It was decided that a range of participatory methods would be used; that the study would be conducted in 20 countries with the expectation of success in 13 (in the end studies were completed in 23 countries); that the range of issues would be limited and the study undertaken according to a prepared methodology guide with room for local adaptation; and that a systematic review of existing studies would be conducted while the new comparative studies were undertaken.

While the framework for the study was evolving, a draft methodology guide was developed and field tested in November 1998 in Bolivia, India, Thailand and Sri Lanka by local research teams. Based on this experience and advice from participatory specialists, the methodology was refined and the final methodology guide developed by January 1999.3 This was translated into Spanish as well as Russian, Indonesian, Thai and Vietnamese.

Focus of the Study

After much discussion, the scope of the inquiry concentrated on four themes:

- **Wellbeing and illbeing**, as defined and experienced by poor people. The study used the local words and concepts of poor people to elicit their ideas about security, risk, vulnerability, opportunities, social exclusion, and crime and conflict; their perception of how their conditions had changed over time; and how households and individuals coped with changes in wellbeing.

- **Problems and priorities** of different groups and how these had changed. Poor men, women and youth identified priority problems and solutions, and who could play what role in solving the problems.

- **Role of institutions**, specifically, the role that public, civic and market institutions play in people's lives; the criteria poor people use in evaluating institutions; to what extent they felt they had control or influence over them; and which institutions supported them in coping with crisis.
Gender relations, changes in gender relations, roles, decision-making and violence within the household and the community, including whether women were better or worse off than in the past and how women fared as compared with men.

Discussions on these topics were held in small groups of men, women, the elderly, youth and sometimes with groups that included a mix of men and women. A range of participatory methods was used. Participants sometimes prepared drawings as a tool for sharing and deepening their discussion and analyses. The research teams were encouraged to explore other topics as they emerged. Throughout, the intention was to enable poor people to express the realities of their experience in their own words.

Country Selection

Country selection was guided by the need to represent different continents and contexts while finding in-country partners who could undertake the research and follow-up. The study was conducted in 23 countries of Africa and the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and South and East Asia (see table 1.1). Insights into the experiences of those living in countries that have experienced recent civil conflict and war come from poor people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Somaliland and Sri Lanka.

To increase the probability of follow-up action, the study proceeded only in countries where a group with capacity for follow-up action at the policy, project, or community level took clear ownership of the study. This was achieved through a negotiated process of cost sharing. The study project was announced widely throughout the World Bank and staff were invited to express interest, identify programs and policies that would be

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informed by the study, contribute matching funds and seek government interest and ownership. In four countries the study was managed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—Bangladesh, Bolivia, India and Somaliland. In Jamaica, Malawi and Nigeria the study was conducted in close collaboration with the field offices of the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID).

In many areas where the study was associated with NGOs, follow-up action was almost immediate as findings were fed into ongoing programs. In many countries workshops have been held with government, civil society and the private sector, and the study is beginning to influence development strategies.

**Site Selection: Representativeness**

Given the constraints of time and resources, national research teams purposively selected 8–15 communities (typically neighborhoods in urban areas and villages in rural areas) to be representative of the most prevalent groups of poor people and a diverse range of people and conditions in that country. A typical example of the site selection process comes from Indonesia, where researchers write:

> There was much discussion with the Government of Indonesia, NGO poverty specialists, and World Bank staff before sites could be selected. Since the locations that could be covered were only 10 or 12, a nationally representative sample was clearly out of the question. The consensus to focus on the island of Java emerged from the fact that Java has the largest number as well as the highest concentration of the country’s poor and is the region hit the hardest by the economic crisis. In order to have some representation of the rest of the country, the choice fell on the Nusa Tenggara islands, which have livelihood patterns and geo-climatic features very different from Java. The decision was made to select 8 out of 12 sites on Java and 4 sites on the NTB-NTT islands. The final selection of communities was made in consultation with district level government personnel and NGOs to ensure a mix of rural and urban sites, a mix of hilly, coastal, and plain sites and a mix of remote and accessible communities.

The objective of representing significant diversity usually was achieved by sampling to include communities from different agroecological zones and regions of the country as well as to ensure inclusion of minority groups, refugees, or other locally relevant unique conditions. In Bulgaria, for example, researchers sampled both rural and urban areas and tried to get some national distribution. In addition one community was chosen to
represent a minority group. The Russian sites included the town of Dzerzhinsk in the Volga region of central Russia, 400 kilometers from Moscow, an area selected for its environmental pollution and known as the “chemical capital of the country and in constant danger of a technical catastrophe.” People there said, “We live on pins and needles all the time. If something happens at the chemical plant, it’ll be like a hydrogen bomb. Nothing will be left in the whole area.” In India two different states were selected, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, to contrast areas that are very different in terms of government effectiveness.

In some countries the selection of communities was influenced by the presence of World Bank or NGO activities. In Brazil the study was designed to support the formulation of an urban strategy; hence a diverse set of urban sites was selected. In Bangladesh and in India communities were chosen in areas where NGOs were already working to ensure use of local data and to facilitate access to the communities. The data in these two countries may be particularly biased by the concentrated presence of NGO assistance.

Using this sampling process, field studies were conducted and analyzed in 23 countries, in close to 300 communities. In India, Jamaica and Uzbekistan one proposed site had to be abandoned in each country because of hostility or violence, particularly in urban slums. During one discussion group in Brazil, a local drug dealer burst into the room carrying a gun because he felt threatened by reports of groups discussing crime and drugs. Fortunately he left quietly. In another community, youths worried about the safety of researchers because of a killing in the neighborhood, escorted the team out of the community before discussions could be completed.

The diversity of sampling procedures means that not every type of poverty was studied, nor are the data nationally representative. This affects the types of statements that can be made, and that are made, in this book.

Within communities researchers used a variety of techniques to reach poor men and women as well as, where possible, groups of elderly and youth. Research teams did not always have control over who participated in the study. Within each community team leaders relied on different methods in forming groups of poor people to conduct small group discussions. In some cases, community contacts from within the community or outside helped in forming groups. In some cases, “poor” people were identified after a discussion of what is poverty or wellbeing and the characteristics of different wellbeing groups in that community. While every attempt was made to sample poor people, sometimes the less poor were present in group discussions. There is probably an underrepresentation of the very poor in discussion groups, people who are often excluded or exclude themselves from community meetings. In each community research teams held group discussions with men, women and youth as well as individual interviews focusing on life stories or case studies of those who had escaped poverty and those who were always poor or were once better off but had become poor.
Experiences in the Field

Fieldwork never proceeds according to the researcher’s wishes and plans. This study is no exception. In Ecuador, for example, the fieldwork started just as the country plunged into financial crisis and all bank accounts were frozen. In all countries the methodology had to be constantly adapted to field conditions: compromises were made, challenges faced and solutions generated. The quotations in this section represent the voices of the local researchers who conducted the research in the 23 countries.

The Pressure of Time

On average each research team member worked 14-15 hours per day. Long hours working, excessive heat at daytime, and walking long distances to reach the village made one team member sick.

—Research team, Gowainghat, Bangladesh

The extreme poor are also often hidden.

—Research team, Jamaica

All research teams felt the time crunch. While the rapid completion of the country studies is a tribute to the in-country researchers' commitment, it was not without impact on the quality of the data. Even though researchers worked long hours, they sometimes had to make compromises in numbers of people and whom they reached, depth of probing, depth of the analyses and feedback to communities.

When time is short, it is easier to conduct discussion groups or hold interviews with those present. In Sri Lanka, for example, research teams in many places found it sometimes difficult to schedule meetings with villagers when it was "convenient to them and without any hindrance to their normal day-to-day work." This problem was particularly acute in villages where beedi (leaf-rolled cigarettes) manufacturing was the main source of income and payment was on a piece-rate basis. "The villagers were very particular about the number of hours they work. They do not even spare the time to attend the 'Samurdhi meetings.' The time they reluctantly spared for us was limited, and sometimes we had to get information from them while they were at work. This also in a way affected our survey."

Similarly in Bangladesh, researchers found it difficult to reach men during the day. As in other countries, this was overcome by scheduling late-night meetings well in advance.

In one community in Malawi only five of the eight scheduled discussion groups could be held. The team leader notes:

This situation came because it was rather difficult to mobilize men who spend most of the day at work and only come home.
in the evening. According to our contact person, the chief him-
self, most men do not stay home even on Saturdays because
they use their time to do other activities to supplement their in-
come. Secondly, on the scheduled dates, there were funerals in
the neighborhood such that the chief excused himself from our
team to facilitate and organize the funeral ceremony. Thirdly,
on the rescheduled date, three of the facilitators had diarrhea
and could not join the team to the field. This, however, did not
affect the process because the people did not turn up either.
The research team did not therefore prepare a date for feed-
back on the research to the community.

While in some places the very poor people, those most marginalized in
society, were included in the study, these people were often absent from or
silent during group discussions. Still, in some places, as will be seen, glimpses
were obtained about the realities of their lives. In Indonesia, for example, re-
searchers systematically scheduled meeting times two days in advance with
people from poorer parts of communities. In Dmitrovgrad, Bulgaria re-
searchers spent time with children from residential institutions for the re-
tarded. They write, “Few of the students were actually retarded, the over-
whelming majority being either abandoned or orphaned children who ended
up at this institution since they had nowhere else to go.” In Moscow teams
met with Tajik refugees and in Bulgaria with Roma groups.

The study was conducted during only one season of the year. In Strudno
Selo, Bulgaria the researchers write, “Spring had come in full force by the
time fieldwork began, 12 April. The villagers had pressing seasonal tasks to
perform: raking of meadows, building fences around them, grazing livestock
before a communal cowherd and shepherd have been hired, preparing the
ground for planting onions, garlic, and potatoes.” In Bangladesh it was the
rainy season and heavy rains made some urban slums mud holes, which were
very difficult to get to. In Vietnam, in Ha Tinh Province, it was the hottest
and driest period of the year. The seasonal effect of the 1998 World Cup foot-
ball in France was not anticipated and affected the first round of fieldwork,
as many people watched football matches during late night and early morn-
ing hours.

In some countries, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean,
researchers paid people small amounts of money for participation in discussion groups. In other countries, snacks, coffee, or tea served halfway through or at the end of discussions were greatly appreciated by participants.

**Establishing Trust**

*There was an element of suspicion among the villagers. It was hard to explain the study objectives to all the villagers in an equal manner during a short period of time.*

—Research team, Elhena, Sri Lanka
Local authorities did not trust our explanation about the purposes and security of results of our investigations. That is why they warned the group participants about the necessity to remember the proverb, “Talking men will die without a disease.” It was not a threat of homicide, but was notice of possible troubles.

—Research team, Takhtakupyr, Uzbekistan

This was our very first site. We wanted it to succeed.

—Research team, Kajima, Ethiopia

Research teams knew well the critical importance of establishing trust. A variety of methods was used to build rapport. Most teams included men and women researchers so as to ease the approach to both men and women. In many countries, teams entered communities with written permits from the government and after briefing local government authorities. The Somaliland report describes one common approach used by the research teams:

Each team leader was responsible for establishing contact with the village or site committee, elder, or headman. It was agreed that at least one respected person from the village should accompany the team to perform the initial introductions, even though most of the team members were not strangers in these villages.

When the teams arrived at the site they requested a meeting with the village elders to explain the purpose of their visit. Individual members would also visit the public places (tea shops, mosques and grocery stores) to establish rapport and familiarize themselves with the community. The first morning of the visit was generally spent in getting acquainted.

The meeting with the elders provided the background of the village and primary information about its people and livelihoods. This meeting also produced suggestions for possible times and places to meet with various community groups.... After initial introductions, all teams reported pastoral people were easy to get along with and their famous hospitality was evident throughout their stay in the village.

In order to learn more about the community and improve acceptance by the community, study team members participated in the community activities, such as watering livestock or collecting wild berries. They also attended social functions like marriage sermons and evening prayers in the mosque.
In many countries, including Indonesia and Jamaica, researchers started their work with a "transect walk," simply walking through a community, stopping to greet people along the way, introducing themselves and learning about the community. Researchers in Bower Bank, Jamaica write:

On the first day, all team members walked slowly across through the only road leading in and out of Bower Bank....The team conducted a transect accompanied by Janet, the community representative...it was a public holiday, Labor Day, and a very good day for a transect as almost everyone was involved in a Labor Day project....

As the week progressed the women participated willingly in our discussion. In contrast the men, especially the young, appeared to be distrustful of our presence and remained skeptical. One young man recalled an incident where his friend had participated in a previous interview and was later assassinated, as a result of his picture being made public.... In order to gain their attention they had to be coaxed and interviewed at their place of relaxation, i.e., on the street, at the domino table, or their smoking corner, unlike the women, who led their own sessions inside the central office.... Interviews were carried out in competition with the surrounding noise, hindrances from passing cars, construction work, children playing, inquisitive passersby, and interruptions by the mentally unstable who are often found wandering through the community.

In some places, despite the best intentions, establishing trust proved harder than was at first apparent as researchers stumbled into local politics and power rivalries. In Kajima, Ethiopia one of the first things that researchers learned was that the community was the result of a merger three years previously of three different communities. The significance of this fact struck the researchers when they realized that the current leader had invited participants only from his part of the community, excluding the other two leaders and their communities. Hence there were not enough people to form eight discussion groups. To correct this problem, researchers decided to return later. They write, "When we went back two days later...we didn't like the atmosphere. Word had gone out that the current Chair of the association had included only his people in the consultations. There was some tension as a result. We thought it would be better to leave and settle with six [eight were planned] discussion groups in the community than to stay and further aggravate the situation."

The difficulties in establishing trust were fiercest in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia sites. In Bulgaria researchers write, "During the preliminary research, the team had experienced some difficulties in gathering focus
groups; we were suspected to be either an American religious sect or spies; so we decided to change tactics and to rely on traditional Bulgarian ways of contacting people: "...through previous contacts, friends, and during informal evening discussions and social gatherings."

In the refugee camp of Bratunac, Bosnia and Herzegovina research teams found, "Gaining the confidence and willingness of camp residents to participate [took] more effort than normal, as residents were highly suspicious toward outsiders, particularly toward anyone associated with international organizations, as many people have been through the camp and made promises that nothing ever came of."

The most extreme suspicion was experienced in Uzbekistan, not by community people, but by local authorities. In one community, the team reports:

After discussion of the causes of poverty, some people were frightened by their own frank words, and gave notice to the local militia that the vakhabists (revolutionaries) are visiting their aul, asking questions about rich and poor people, about reasons for poverty and sources of poverty and agitating poor people about rich people and authorities. On April 7th our house was encircled by a group of soldiers with automatic guns. They took our passports and documents and arrested us, and the next day the whole group was evicted from the district. After examination of our documents, and determining that we were not vakhabists, two weeks later our group was allowed to continue work in the same site.

Unprepared to Deal with Loss, Grief and Anger

When pursuing the case study, participants were asked to relive painful memories, which resulted in one respondent crying as his memory unfolded. This was painful to both him and the team member.

—Research team, Bower Bank, Jamaica

All research teams received field-based training in participatory research methods. One major oversight was the psychological preparation of the teams themselves to deal with the emotional intensity of being with poor people for a month or more while facilitating free-flowing discussions about their lives. In addition, researchers felt they were not equipped to deal with the emotional stress, grief and despair that was sometimes unleashed among participants as a result of questions about poverty.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the team leader writes, "Two of our notetakers, young men, were strongly affected by the process. Milos crying silently while taking notes during one discussion group, and Dado having nightmares and tension headaches after fieldwork."
In Takhtakupyr, Uzbekistan groups included very poor people who became upset during discussions of criteria of poverty, problems, priorities and cause-impact analysis of poverty. To them, “methods of analysis of their own ‘bad life’ looked like a forgotten dusty mirror. People were so busy looking for food that they did not have time to look at the mirror. Our visit compelled them to wipe the dust and to look into the mirror and answer the question ‘Why are we poor?’ Sometimes this upset the participants very much. Participants remembered:

- The absence of bread and the necessity to send the children to the neighbor, since they had already gone to ask for bread several times before and hesitated to go again.
- The relative who died in the hospital because they could not buy the required medicine in time.
- Their children had forgotten the taste of sugar and meat.
- Their children could not go to school due to the absence of clothes and shoes.

“All this caused tears of despair, and the members of the investigation group had depressing feelings of helplessness which had broken the dynamic of the group and made it impossible to concentrate on the cause-impact analysis of poverty.”

Security concerns added to the psychological stress among researchers. In Ecuador, the lead researcher received late night calls from field team members frightened by street gangs and drug dealers.

*Participatory Methods: What Worked and What Did Not*

*Informants discussed gender relations with great interest.*
—Research team, Bashi, Kyrgyz Republic

*Goat droppings, pebbles, small cards with pictures made by the people themselves were used for scoring and ranking.*
—Research team, Daanweyne, Somaliland

*There was much debate and disagreement between the women regarding the importance of the institutions, and it was difficult to gain consensus.*
—Research team, Adaboya, Ghana

*For most of the fieldworkers, but particularly for those from government institutions, it was the first time for training in participatory methodology, involving interactive learning instead of lecture-style passive learning…. A longer training with more fieldwork and practice must be considered essential.*
—Research team, Ha Tinh, Vietnam
The study methods are rooted in the open-ended tradition of participatory and qualitative research inquiry. The study methodology guide states, "This approach explicitly encourages study teams to explore key issues that emerge by country, culture, social group, gender, age, occupation, or other dimensions of difference of local importance. New and old study tools will be used to uncover and understand the perspectives and insights of the poor, enabling them to express and analyze their realities, with outsiders playing a facilitating role."

Participatory methods, both verbal and visual and including drawing, scoring, ranking and mapping, were used through non-dominating behaviors by the researchers. Some of the country research teams were familiar with these approaches and all research teams were trained in participatory research tools.

Researchers changed the sequencing of methods as needed. In Bangladesh, for example, the teams found that starting the work with discussions of "wellbeing" raised expectations of relief and, hence, after the first day the team decided to start with "problems and priorities." Almost everywhere researchers struggled to find simple local terms for words in the methodology guide. Words that were particularly difficult included wellbeing, poverty, crisis, household, risk, vulnerability, institutions and social exclusion.

Out of these struggles much was learned. In the Kyrgyz Republic the discussion of gender relations was introduced using a press clip that focused on domestic abuse to try to break the code of silence surrounding the issue. In Argentina sociodrama—enactment of gender roles—was used. In Jamaica role-playing, an activity called "a turned-over tortilla," was developed whereby men enacted women's lives and vice versa. In Bulgaria a focus on the functions of institutions emerged as the most effective strategy to get the institutions discussion started. In Vietnam all team members were requested to note five or more quotations per day that surprised and impressed them. In Bangladesh team members took on specialized roles each day: a lead facilitator, co-facilitator, content recorder, environment setter and process recorder.

While all researchers experienced some difficulties with some methods, the overall experience is summarized in the Jamaica National Report: "It is important to underline the high acceptance of the methodology by the people in the various locations in which we work. It also contributed to strengthening relations between investigators and participants."

Being asked to describe their lives, being heard and engaging in discussion proved to be a novelty and a big draw in many countries. In Indonesia research teams note:

*The interest generated was overwhelming. The researchers found people turning up in much larger-than-expected numbers and staying on to talk past midnight. Additional groups had to be conducted at times in order not to disappoint those who.*
came. The visual tools helped generate much interest and deeper insight, as people lost their self-consciousness and got involved in drawing, sorting, scoring, and diagramming.”

Despite many problems, the overall feeling among researchers, many of whom had never used participatory methods before, was that it was a “fantastic experience.” In Uzbekistan the researchers write that participation in the study helped them see their own country with new eyes: “honestly speaking, the sympathy and sense of sharing the destiny of each person encountered which arose during the research process was an experience never achieved in any of our previous studies, either qualitative or quantitative...The sensation of insight and sympathy for our own people is the most important finding of this study.”

The reflections of the researchers in Vietnam capture well the sentiments of the research teams who participated in this study:

"Given an opportunity to speak with people ready to listen, poor women, men, boys, and girls were ready, willing, and capable of discussing, analyzing, and articulating a wide range of issues related to poverty and the ways and means of overcoming it. An initial hesitation disappeared easily into passionate and often heated discussions and deliberations. Initially it was found to be very difficult for PPA [Participatory Poverty Assessment] fieldwork staff to listen to poor people mainly because they thought that poor people knew little and had very little to say. Basic mistakes that were made during the first round of the PPA were not taking comprehensive notes, lacking patience to wait for and listen to people’s replies, and guessing answers to questions posed to informants. However, these mistakes were less in evidence during the PPA’s second round."

Data Analyses

Notes were written up every day, often until dawn.
—Research team, Jamaica

At the end of each day, the team sat together to analyze the day’s activities and study findings. Strategies for the next day were also discussed and planned.
—Research team, Somaliland

There was a constant tension between the need to present and represent the diversity of views and opinions of poor people and the need to have a sharp, focused, and message-loaded presentation of findings.
—Research team, Ha Tinh, Vietnam
In almost every country researchers wrote, analyzed and discussed findings and interpretations at the end of the day. In some areas where this was not possible they went back to communities to cross-check information as necessary. As elsewhere, in Vietnam the team held daily reviews and wrote fieldwork reports. The entire team in a given district attempted to meet every two days to share experiences and make tactical decisions about what was working and what was not. In Ghana the teams met every evening. In most site reports, researchers were careful to distinguish between their own opinions and interpretations and what was actually said.

The aggregation of data first from different groups within a community, then from several communities into district reports, and finally into national reports proved to be a painful process. Four hurdles emerged. First, there was the challenge of not losing poor people's voices and realities while imposing some organization. Second, it was important not to lose diversity while still grouping by commonalities. Third, suggestions for quantification—or even identification of frequencies especially in priority problems—became cumbersome and began to take precedence over documentation of what was said in poor people's own words. Fourth, fieldworkers were often reluctant to spend time analyzing across communities and writing reports. Time shortages and lack of experience in synthesizing qualitative reports further aggravated the research process in some countries.

After fieldwork was completed national workshops to collate and compare findings were held in several countries, including Argentina, Bangladesh, Ecuador, Nigeria and Vietnam. This led to the preparation of National Synthesis Reports. The teams and project staff shared draft country studies and other insights at an international workshop in New Delhi, India in June 1999, which also marked the beginning of the global synthesis. Three months later in September 1999 a preliminary global synthesis was completed, which provides the foundation for this book.

**Ethics of Participatory Methods**

It may be that the villagers were not interested in providing information, as they saw no direct benefit for them of this study.

—Research team, Ethena, Sri Lanka

A lot of people secretly tried to ask us to solve their problems; we couldn't do that.

—Research team, Turkul, Uzbekistan

People were busy in the fields. People were also expecting us to take relief food to them. This made the study difficult. People were also fed up with meetings with NGOs due to empty promises.

—Research team, Muchinka, Zambia
[Village] people were particularly interested to hear about the problems and priorities...they thanked the study team for the work done and said that the work had made them think of possible ways to resolve their problems.

—Research team, Ak Kiya, Kyrgyz Republic

The field research posed four continuing ethical challenges that can apply to all research with poor people—and not only research that uses participatory approaches and methods. They arise especially when the prime objective is not to directly empower and benefit the participants, but to help outsiders learn about the experience and realities of poor people, and then to influence policy and practice.

Taking People’s Time. The time of poor people is valuable. The challenge here is to try to ensure at least commensurate benefits. In a few cases participants were remunerated for their time and trouble. In others, forms of hospitality were given. Perhaps more important, when poor people express and analyze their realities, they often themselves learn and gain satisfaction from the experience, enjoy it and develop solidarity with others. The process can lead not only to enhanced awareness, but also to taking action.

Raised Expectations. It was stressed to the research teams that they should clearly and repeatedly say they could not promise any assistance. Nevertheless, it was recognized as unavoidable that to some degree expectations would be raised. While follow-up action is taking place at the community level in some countries, the need remains urgent overall.

Feedback. The methodology guide and the terms of reference for the country studies say that researchers would feed information back to the communities before leaving them or upon return. Despite time constraints, many country teams shared the initial findings with community groups. Feedback meetings were held in community halls, libraries, council meeting rooms, garages and private homes, and under trees. This generated much excitement, pensiveness, sometimes sorrow and requests for information, contacts and assistance to solve problems. Often the findings on problems and priorities and on institutions generated the most interest.

In Brazil and Ecuador written copies of the community report were sent back to communities. In Brazil this process resulted in one community leader requesting multiple copies of the report, which he is using to lobby the municipality for improvements in services. He also sent a copy of the report to the president of the country. However, overall, the process of feedback is far from complete.

Follow-up Action. In some areas where the study was undertaken by NGOs working in the community areas, as in Bangladesh and Vietnam, or by community-based organizations, such as in Somaliland, there was scope for follow-up action, with findings feeding immediately into ongoing programs. At the Khaliajuri site in Bangladesh, for example, Concern Bangladesh at once undertook a program to help villagers improve their damaged and
dilapidated housing. All this said, ethical issues remain that demand sustained efforts to ensure follow-up at all levels.

**Challenges in Writing This Book**

Writing this global synthesis has not been simple. Not only has there been much material—close to 10,000 pages of field notes and national synthesis reports coming from 23 countries—we have also faced a struggle between the voices of those who experience deprivation and poverty and our own training, which drives us to categorize and use words that fit into the current development discourse. Our effort should be viewed as a stage in the search for understanding.

**Problems of Language and Syntax.** In seeking to enable poor people to express their realities, we have tried not to impose our words, constructs and concepts. In writing, we have had little option, most of the time, but to use words and concepts in English. We sometimes use the phrase "the poor" to refer to poor men and women to avoid endless repetition of the same phrase "poor people" or "poor women and men," often several times in one paragraph or one page. It neither signifies disrespect, nor does it imply that poor people form a homogeneous group.

**Generalizations: What Can and Cannot Be Said.** The generalizations have emerged from a systematic process of content analysis. From this process, crosscutting themes have emerged, some of which are summarized in the headings of chapters and sections. However, these themes are not necessarily universal. We cross-checked the conclusions we drew by going back to country reports and site reports. In two cases—the analysis of trends in domestic violence and the institutional rankings by community groups—because of the importance of the findings and to ensure that we were not overgeneralizing, we went back and checked every discussion group in every site report and analyzed data for frequency of occurrence. Finally, we also quantified data from mini-case studies on triggers for upward and downward mobility.

Our generalizations are not meant to apply to any country as a whole. In the interests of readability, we chose not to qualify every general statement by saying that it was "based on the communities and people who took part in this study." The reader should keep this in mind when she or he reads, for example, "In Nigeria women say...." We communicate the key themes that have emerged from the analyses through the words of poor people themselves. Their voices are more direct, vivid, powerful and authentic than ours. We use their voices to echo themes that emerged over and over in very different contexts. Finally, although the fieldwork was conducted in 1999, we convey the findings often in present tense to close the distance between the reader and poor people and to add immediacy to what they expressed.

Our hope is that positive changes will result from the enormous efforts of the more than 20,000 poor people who participated in the study.
Notes

1Appendix 1 identifies the leaders and members of the national research teams and many, many others who contributed to the study.

2Voices of the Poor is based on the voices of over 60,000 poor women and men. The research consists of two parts. The first is a systematic review of 81 Participatory Poverty Assessments prepared primarily for the World Bank in the 1990s. These studies reached over 40,000 poor men and women in 50 different countries. The review is entitled Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us? by Deepa Narayan, with Raj Patel, Kai Schafft, Anne Rademacher and Sarah Koch-Schulte (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). A review of participatory poverty studies involving 50 focus groups conducted by NGOs and bilateral organizations was prepared in parallel by Karen Brock with the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, entitled “It’s Not Only Wealth That Matters—It’s Peace of Mind Too: A Review of Participatory Work on Poverty and Illbeing.” This was published in an informal publications series for the Global Synthesis Workshop, Consultations with the Poor, World Bank, PREM, Poverty Group, Washington, D.C., September 1999.

The second part of the Voices of the Poor study, of which this book is a part, is new comparative research conducted in 23 countries in early 1999 and involving over 20,000 poor women and men. The Process Guide, which contains the methodology used during the fieldwork, was published as Methodology Guide: Consultations with the Poor. The findings from 21 countries are available in the National Synthesis Reports from Argentina, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kyrgyz Republic, Malawi, Nigeria, Russia, Somaliland, Thailand, Uzbekistan, Vietnam and Zambia. Initial global findings were summarized in Global Synthesis: Consultations with the Poor by Deepa Narayan, Robert Chambers, Meera Shah and Patric Peteesch. The Global Synthesis, National Synthesis Reports and the Methodology Guide were also published in the informal series for the Global Synthesis Workshop: Consultations with the Poor, World Bank, PREM, Poverty Group, Washington D.C., September 1999. A final book in the Voices of the Poor series, Voices of the Poor: From Many Lands edited by Deepa Narayan and Patric Peteesch (Oxford University Press, forthcoming), draws upon the 23 country studies and presents country case studies as well as regional patterns. For further information on the research project and its reports, see http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/voices.

3For the full Methodology Guide, see www.worldbank.org/poverty/voices.

4See appendix 3 for further information on the study themes.

5Appendix 2 summarizes the criteria for selecting sites and lists the communities visited in each country.

6Pseudonyms have been used throughout the book to protect the identity of the study participants.

7A three-day workshop was held in Washington, D.C. which brought together all the country research teams, 70 development practitioners and the WDR 2000/01 team. Country research team leaders interacted with Bank staff and others in a series
of half-day workshops hosted jointly with the Bank's regional departments and a day was spent with members of the WDR 2000/01 team. Twenty-five reports of country findings, secondary reviews, global syntheses and a methodology guide were published and distributed at this workshop. All reports are available from the *Voices of the Poor* Web site indicated in endnote 2.
Chapter 2

Wellbeing and Illbeing:
The Good and the Bad Life

Summary

Despite the diversity of poor participants, their ideas of wellbeing and the good life are multidimensional and have much in common. Enough for a good life is not a lot, and for those with little, a little more can mean a great deal. Across continents, countries, contexts, and types of people, a good quality of life includes material wellbeing, which is often expressed as having enough; bodily wellbeing, which includes being strong, well and looking good; social wellbeing, including caring for and settling children; having self-respect, peace and good relations in the family and community; having security, including civil peace, a safe and secure environment, personal physical security and confidence in the future; and having freedom of choice and action, including being able to help other people in the community. Wealth and wellbeing are seen as different, and even contradictory.

Descriptions of illbeing are also multidimensional and interwoven. Experiences of illbeing include material lack and want (of food, housing and shelter, livelihood, assets and money); hunger, pain and discomfort; exhaustion and poverty of time; exclusion, rejection, isolation and loneliness; bad relations with others, including bad relations within the family; insecurity, vulnerability, worry, fear and low self-confidence; and powerlessness, helplessness, frustration and anger.

Wellbeing and illbeing are states of mind and being. Wellbeing has a psychological and spiritual dimension as a mental state of harmony, happiness and peace of mind. Illbeing includes mental distress, breakdown, depression and madness, often described by participants to be impacts of poverty. Children have a distinct view of the bad life. An overarching issue is how to enable poor people to diminish illbeing and enhance wellbeing, gaining for themselves more of the good life to which they aspire.
Wellbeing Is Multidimensional

A better life for me is to be healthy, peaceful and to live in love, without hunger. Love is more than anything. Money has no value in the absence of love.

—A 26-year-old woman, Dibdibe Wajtu, Ethiopia

The starting question posed by the researchers to the small group discussion with poor women and poor men is, “How do you define wellbeing, or a good quality of life, and illbeing or a bad quality of life?” From these discussions emerge local people’s own terminology and definitions of wellbeing, deprivation, illbeing, vulnerability and poverty. The terms wellbeing and illbeing were chosen for their open-ended breadth, so that poor people would feel free to express whatever they felt about a good life and a bad life. “We are trying to present a new way of seeing wellbeing,” notes a researcher. It is the way poor people see it themselves.

Poor people’s ideas of a good quality of life are multidimensional. As explored in part I of this chapter, they cluster around the following themes: material wellbeing, physical wellbeing, social wellbeing, security, and freedom of choice and action. All of these combine pervasively in states of mind as well as body, in personal psychological experiences of wellbeing. Much of illbeing was described as the opposite of these. Part II examines these dimensions in turn: material deprivation; physical illbeing; bad social relations; vulnerability, worry and fear, low self-confidence; and powerlessness, helplessness and frustration. Part III describes the psychological dimensions of wellbeing and illbeing. In describing the conditions of their lives, poor children especially express resentment.

Part I. Wellbeing: The Good Life

How Poor People Put It

Ideas of wellbeing are strikingly similar across the range of participants. Despite differences of detail and contexts that are diverse, complex and nuanced, the commonalities stand out. The same dimensions and aspects of wellbeing are repeatedly expressed, across continents, countries and cultures, in cities, towns and rural areas alike. And they are expressed by different people—women and men, young and old, children and adults.

For women in Tabe Erez in rural Ghana wellbeing means security: being protected by God, having children to give you security in old age, having a peaceful mind (tiehwa vilak), patience (kanyi, meaning not holding a grudge against anyone), and plenty of rain.

To have most, it not all, of the necessary basis of life is imoyo mubumi and imoyo wabwino, wellbeing as described by different groups in Malawi.
These basics include certain assets, adequate food, decent medical care, constant and regular sources of income, nice clothes, good bedding, a house that does not leak, a toilet, a bathroom, a kitchen, healthy bodies, couples being respectful of each other, being God-fearing, having well-behaved children who are not selfish, and having peace of mind.

For those in Khallajuri in rural Bangladesh having a good quality of life means having employment for the whole year, a good house, four or five cows, a fishing net, good clothes to put on, food to eat to one's heart's content, and being able to protect one's house from flood erosion. Middle-aged women say that for a good quality of life there should be a male member of the household earning money, a son for every mother, and no husbands pursuing polygamy.

A participant from Renggarasi in rural Indonesia considers a person to be living well who can secure his family's needs with produce from his livestock and who is able to help others who need material and non-material things or advice.

In Nigeria wellbeing is described by different people as being a responsible person who has a pleasant life, peace of mind, security and independence, and who is popular with the people, is able to marry easily, is able to educate children, is able to patronize private clinics and schools, and who has money, land, a house and good clothes.

In Bulgaria the major distinctive feature of wellbeing is stable employment, which means having money as well as security. The National Synthesis Report notes that the family is another important aspect, along with being able to socialize and being in harmony with oneself. The wealthy, seen as those who have and flaunt money and power, do not necessarily have the respect and security that the community considers essential parts of wellbeing.

In the Kyrgyz Republic, informants understand wellbeing as good life and wealth; however, they do not think that wellbeing is limited to these tangible components, and believe that wellbeing is impossible without tolerance, peace, family and children. The informants think that the basis of wellbeing is good health, peace in the family and in the society; in their opinion, wealth, which is an important component of wellbeing, can only be gained if these conditions are present. From the Kyrgyz Republic it is also reported that most of the informants define wellbeing as stability on a household and society level and ability to satisfy one's material and spiritual needs.

In Barrio Las Pascuas in urban Bolivia, a group of youths say that those who have a good life are "those who do not lack food," and those who are not worried every day about what they are going to do tomorrow to get food for their children. They have secure work, and if the husband does not work, the wife does." In Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in another part of urban Bolivia young men say that, besides having adequate food and work, wellbeing is to be friendly and to have friends, to have the support of family and society, and "to be patient, and above all happy."
Materially, Enough for a Good Life Is Not a Lot

I would like to live simply. I don't like houses with too much inside. To have a bit more comfort. Nothing big... I would like a simple house... not big, or luxurious... a simple house with a floor.

—A 21-year-old man, Esmeraldas, Ecuador

It is perhaps part of the human condition to aspire not for the moon, but for imaginable improvements. Participants were clear that enough materially for a good life for them was not excessive or unrealistic (see box 2.1). They hope for moderate, not extravagant, improvements. They do not see substantial wealth as necessary for wellbeing. Rather, they express the material dimension of life in terms of having enough for a reasonable level of living. And the material is only one dimension among others.

It is not just that poor people's material aspirations are modest. It is also that the worse off they are, the more a small improvement means. A little then means a lot. This may apply especially with women who so frequently have so little. For women in two Malawi rural sites part of a good life is having adequate utensils, especially pails for drawing water and a rack for drying plates. To a discussion of wellbeing in Bangladesh, a group of older women add, "Those who could pass time for the prayer of God after taking a full meal and could sleep on a bamboo-made platform live a good quality of life.”

Box 2.1 The Good Life, Caring for Children

To be well is when you have money, and you have a family and children. You need to have savings in order to be able to support your children till later on in life:

—A young man, Bulgaria

A good life is to have enough food and clothing for my children. To educate them to be self-sufficient when we get retired:

—A man, Mithi Kelo, Ethiopia

The rich manage to send their children to school and also to take their children to the clinic:

—A man, Musanya, Zambia

To be well means to see your grandchildren happy, well-dressed and to know that your children have settled down; to be able to give them food and money whenever they come to see you, and not to ask them for help and money:

—An old woman from rural Bulgaria
None of this justifies modest ambitions in development, accepting the horizons of poor people where these are limited, or restraining efforts to help them and to help them help themselves. To the contrary, it hugely reinforces the case for giving overwhelming priority to their wellbeing as they envisage it. Gains by poor people should come first. When the objective is to enhance the wellbeing to which poor people aspire, the benefits from small changes can be large indeed.

**Material Wellbeing: Having Enough**

*But at least for each child to have a bed, a pair of shoes, a canopy over their heads, two sheets—not to sleep like we do on the ground.*

—Ana Maria, a poor woman, Esmeraldas, Ecuador

*A poor person is a person who does not own anything that provides him with a permanent source of living. If a person has a permanent source of income, he will not ask for other people’s assistance.*

—A poor woman from Sidka, Egypt

Three aspects of material wellbeing that are repeatedly mentioned are food, assets and work.

**Food.** Adequate food is a universal need. In Malawi hunger is ranked as the number one problem by nearly every discussion group in the three urban and seven rural communities participating in the study. Elsewhere—across the range of countries—enough to eat every day is again and again stressed as a feature of wellbeing. In contexts as different as Bangladesh, Bulgaria and Zambia wellbeing included being able to have three meals a day, all year round. Food security too is a critical component, with the number of months of food security given frequently as a criterion for ranking wellbeing, particularly in Vietnam.

**Assets.** For those living in rural areas secure tenure of adequate resources, especially land, is another nearly universal criterion of wellbeing. This often includes ownership of livestock. In urban areas the parallel needs are savings and capital, and access to consumer goods. In urban Ghana wellbeing is identified with capital to start a business. The need for housing—as well as furniture, utensils and tools—is also a virtually universal aspect of wellbeing and sometimes poor people describe a “house that should not let in the rain.”

**Work.** Work to gain a livelihood is a nearly universal aspiration among participants. Money itself is mentioned less frequently than one might expect and, when mentioned, it is implied by other aspects of wellbeing such as the ability to find paid work to obtain money, to buy clothes and to pay for health treatment and school expenses. A poor man in Thompson Pen in Jamaica says, “Work makes all the difference in the world. I feel bad,
miserable, sick, and can't take doing nothing. My wife, at 78, is still working. My dream is a little work to make ends meet."

In rural areas work takes many forms; it is usually agricultural and linked with land. In urban areas it means a steady job, which is stressed again and again by those who are without work or who are striving to make a livelihood through casual labor or informal and illegal activities. Whether it is Malawi, where one idea of wellbeing is both husband and wife working, or Russia, where participants stress the importance of wages that are regularly paid, the desire is for productive work to provide an adequate and secure livelihood.

**Bodily Wellbeing: Being and Appearing Well**

Material wellbeing is rarely mentioned without other critical aspects of a good life. These include the bodily wellbeing of health and appearance, as well as a good physical environment.

Almost everywhere, health and access to health services—whether informal or formal—are important. A healthy and strong body is seen as crucial to wellbeing—not just for a sense of physical wellbeing in itself, but as a precondition for being able to work. A person who is sick and weak cannot work or cannot work well.

For some, especially for girls and young women, the importance of appearance—of both body and clothing—comes through forcefully. Quality of skin is often referred to. In Muchinka in rural Zambia the bodies of the better off are said to "look well." For urban poor people in Jamaica criteria for wellbeing include "skin tone looks balanced" and "looking well fed." In Gowainghat, Bangladesh clothes, oil for the hair and soap are important to young women. Across cultures and contexts being able to dress well and appear well is repeatedly stated as part of a good quality of life.

The third dimension of physical wellbeing is physical environment, with wellbeing in Accompong, Jamaica associated with, for example, "the fresh air in the hills of Cockpit Country." The aspect of physical environment, however, is more often used in a negative context and is described, for example, as the bad experiences of living in "the places of the poor."

**Social Wellbeing**

Social wellbeing includes care and wellbeing of children; self-respect and dignity; and peace and good relations within the family, community and country.

*Being Able to Care for, Bring up, Marry and Settle Children.* In Nigeria, of the 48 aspects of wellbeing identified, no fewer than eight of them refer to children. Having happy and healthy children, feeding them, clothing them, being able to take them for treatment when sick, and being able to send them to school and pay school bills are common concerns strongly expressed. In Bangladesh households that are financially well off are those that can afford clothes and education for their children.
To be able to marry and settle children is a frequent aspiration. In Malawi and Uzbekistan wedding ceremonies conducted in good style are important. In Amperan Utara, Indonesia one of the criteria for differentiating wellbeing groups is the ability to meet the costs of children’s weddings; the top group has no problems; the second group can meet the cost; the third has to become indebted to meet the costs; and the issue for the bottom group is simply not mentioned. Landless women in Dorapalli in India identify a major impact of poverty as “difficulty in marrying girl children.” In El-bil-ille, Somaliland the well off are those who can afford marriage-related costs and who always marry at an early age.

Self-Respect and Dignity. Self-respect and dignity, as described by poor people, means being able to live without being a burden to others; living without extending one’s hand; living without being subservient to anybody; and being able to bury dead family members decently. In Nigeria this includes being listened to, being popular, and being able to fulfill social obligations and to help others.

Peace, Harmony and Good Relations in the Family and the Community. Many poor people consider the absence of conflicts essential for family and social wellbeing. In Ghana this is expressed as unity in the household or community. In Uzbekistan it means peace and calm in the family, in the country and in one’s own community.

Good relations extend to social cohesion and support, and to helping one another. In Vietnam near Hua Tinh poor people state their priorities as being able to “encourage people to visit, support and give presents (show feelings in general) to households dealing with crises and during the holidays.”

Security

Security includes predictability and safety in life and confidence in the future.

Civil Peace. A group of elderly residents of Ak Kiya in the Kyrgyz Republic comment, “Among all wellbeing criteria, peace is the most important one. Now there is war in Yugoslavia and in other countries. God willing, it would not happen here. As they say, ‘be hungry but live in peace.’” Even in contexts without recent experience of civil conflict or war, such as this one in the Kyrgyz Republic, civil peace was often ranked high. Peace—the absence of war, violence and disorder—is the most important component of wellbeing for those living in the context of recent war or disorder.

A Physically Safe and Secure Environment. Wellbeing means not being vulnerable to physical disasters, threats and discomforts that are so typical of the places of poor people. These included floods in urban Argentina and rural Bangladesh, wild animals in Sri Lanka and India, water pollution from industry in Bulgaria, the disaster from the Aral Sea in Uzbekistan, and air pollution from industry in Olmaliq, Uzbekistan. These are named among many other physical, often seasonal, threats.

Personal Physical Security. “Here we live with our door open,” report participants in rural Argentina. A man in Jamaica says that “this is a ghetto
community, but you don't have any violence; you can walk (around) here any hour of the night and no one is going to harm you." Again in Jamaica, the relaxed atmosphere and the high level of personal safety in the countryside are valued.

**Lawfulness and Access to Justice.** Refugees in a Russian city who survived the horror of a civil war and genocide and who were objects of constant abuses describe "peace" and "the absence of constant fear" as the main prerequisites of a good life. Lawfulness and access to justice are widely seen as aspects of wellbeing, particularly in Nigeria. Security from persecution by the police and other powers that be is a priority for many, especially for urban vendors.

**Security in Old Age.** Particularly for older people, security and support in old age are a primary concern. An old woman in Khalajuri, Bangladesh says that, for a good quality of life, a son must not sever the family bond after marriage and he must provide food to his mother.

**Confidence in the Future.** The good life is also frequently defined as being able to look forward to the future. Especially in countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina and Russia that have experienced recent national traumas participants value being able to have confidence in a stable and predictable future. They say that they once had this, but that it is now only experienced by a few rich people.

**Freedom of Choice and Action**

The research team from Brazil puts it like this:

> People tended to equate poverty with powerlessness and impotence, and to relate wellbeing to security and a sense of control of their lives. A woman from the community of Borborema established a connection between power and control, and wellbeing. She argued, "The rich one is someone who says, 'I am going to do it,' and does it." The poor, in contrast, do not fulfill their wishes or develop their capacities.

Freedom of choice and action extends to having the means to help others. Being able to be a good person is a feature of the good life that poor people often highlight. A young man in Isla Trinitaria, Ecuador wants to be able to buy clothes for his sisters. In Malawi a good characteristic of one high category of wellbeing was to love everyone and help others when they have problems. Wellbeing is quite frequently linked with moral responsibility, with having the wherewithal to help others, and with having enough money to be able to give to charity or a religious organization.

What people say they wish to be able to do covers a huge range: to gain education and skills; to have mobility and the means to travel; and to have time for rest, recreation and being with people—among others. Underlying all of these—and the material, physical, social and security dimensions—
is a fundamental aspiration. Participants in many contexts say that they want to be able to make choices, to decide to do basic things without constraint, to live in a predictable environment and have some control over what happens.

Diversity by Context and Person

For all of these commonalities, there are differences of aspiration and of concepts of wellbeing. They vary by continental region, by rural and urban areas, by livelihood, by age and by gender.

The contrasts are perhaps not surprising, but listing a few of those that are more striking can make and illustrate the point without any attempt to be comprehensive:

- In Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Bulgaria, the Kyrgyz Republic, Russia and Uzbekistan, wellbeing is frequently defined nostalgically as the "normal" condition, meaning before the end of communism. In Russia wellbeing criteria are taken from the past and not the present.
- Among pastoralists, whether Somalis in Somaliland or Kalmik in Russia, wellbeing is often intimately linked with animals.
- Poor rural people emphasize land and livestock, farming capital and inputs for livelihood activities, and being able to farm on one's own.
- Poor urban people repeatedly emphasize employment, a job, infrastructure, housing, security of tenure, and physical security. They sometimes have higher material aspirations for consumption goods than rural people. In one urban site in Malawi participants say that wellbeing entails leading a European (Western) life (moyo wachicanga), having houses to rent out to others, having decent and well-paying jobs, and having very good houses with electricity.
- Women tend more often than men to mention peace in the family; good social relations in the community; adequate and nutritious food; good drinking water; being able to bring up children in good conditions, keep them healthy, and send them to school; and not being maltreated in the family.
- Men tend more often to mention material productive goods, and time to relax. There are exceptions to these generalizations, and there is a danger of stereotyping gendered priorities and values, especially at a time when change in gender roles in many places is rapid.
- The views of some poor children were asked. In Chittagong, Bangladesh, according to children, wellbeing means having near and clean surroundings, with facilities for education, being able to play freely, living in a building, having good food...
(fish, meat, vegetables, etc.), going every morning to madrassa (traditional Muslim school), and everybody living in harmony. Peace and harmony in the family and in society are important to children.

**Wealth and Wellbeing Are Different**

In discussions on criteria for a good life, the researchers report:

- “The group of young people underscored the need to have a family, to feel supported and understood.”—According to a youth group in Barrio Universitarios, Bolivia
- In Bulgaria, “wealth and wellbeing are not identical, for the rich have money but don’t have security, nor are they respected by the community. Illbeing is, however, identical with poverty: this is ‘our situation.’”
- In Russia, “the life of the well-to-do people was never called a ‘good life.’ Ultimately, when both the younger and older participants talked about the well-to-do people, they would never call their life a ‘good’ one.”

Good living or wellbeing in Zambia, “can mean being liked, but also can make others jealous and bring hatred and death.” Participants repeatedly distinguish between wealth and wellbeing. Those who are wealthy are by no means always in the top category for wellbeing. For example, a widow who is rich might not be put in the top wellbeing category because widowhood is a bad condition.

The wealthy can be generous and good, but often they are seen in a bad light. A 54-year-old man from Kok Yangak in the Kyrgyz Republic says:

*One can make a fortune, but if it has negative effects for the rest of the community, such wealth gives just an illusion of wellbeing, because it does not do any good for people. If somebody’s wellbeing is based on the illbeing of others, it is not a true wellbeing. There are rich people in the village. They made their fortune by selling alcohol and vodka. The community does not like these people, because their prosperity is only possible due to the growing problem of alcoholism in the village.*

In contrast, poverty and nonmaterial wellbeing can sometimes be found together. In rural Accompong in Jamaica the researchers write that “the lives of all citizens are impacted by this peace within the neighborhood. Despite hard times and obvious poverty among most of the households an open welcome and hospitality to visitors and strangers to the community gives a distinct feeling of wellbeing and a good quality of life.”
Part II. Illbeing: The Bad Life

The family was housed in a thatched hut and there was no way that they could have two square meals a day. The lunch would be finished by munching some sugarcane. Once in a while they would taste “sattu” (made of flour), pulses, and potatoes, etc., but for special occasions only. During the rains the water used to pour down the thatched roof and the family would go to seek cover in the corners to avoid getting wet. Their clothing would be of coarse material and they would content themselves with one or two pairs of clothes for a year. The wages then used to be paid as 1 kg of grain per day. After three years of marriage, unable to bear the harassment of the mother-in-law, both Nagina Devi and her husband separated from her.

—A poor mother, Manjhar, India

Illbeing and the bad life bring with them different sorts of bad experience. These are many and interwoven. Some correspond to the opposites of the clusters of wellbeing: lack and want are material; hunger, pain, discomfort, exhaustion and poverty of time are physical; bad personal relations, exclusion, rejection, abuse, isolation and loneliness are social; vulnerability and fear relate to insecurity; and helplessness, frustration and anger reflect powerlessness. It is also striking, though, how much of the bad life they miss, for there are others that flow from and feed them: loss, anguish, grief, humiliation, shame and persistent anxiety, worry and mental distress. Box 2.2 features selections from poor people’s definitions and criteria of illbeing.

The Multidimensionality of Illbeing

As with wellbeing, participants describe illbeing as multidimensional. The most frequently mentioned dimensions of illbeing correspond closely to dimensions of wellbeing. The bad life is marked by many bad conditions, experiences and feelings. Box 2.3 illustrates the range of expressions that poor men and women from Ethiopia used to describe the bad life.

Material Lack and Want

Food. The most frequently mentioned want or lack is food. In every country poor families report that they miss meals. They often only eat once a day and sometimes have nothing for days on end. A saying in Ethiopia is, “If one eats breakfast, there is no supper.” Hunger is highly seasonal in rural areas. In urban Russia it peaks towards the end of the month, before
Box 2.2 Expressions of illbeing

The words and expressions used for the bad life are naturally different in different language groups, countries and communities. A selection gives a sense of the range.

Illbeing and wellbeing have close equivalents in Spanish-speaking Latin America—mala suerte and bienestar. Mala suerte is a common word in Spanish, meaning a sense of unease or discomfort, which can be physical, social or psychological. It is not a synonym for poverty (pobreza). In urban Argentina, the words situación crítica (critical condition), vida complicada (a complicated life), and maldad (situation where everything has gone wrong, total scarcity) are also used.

In Bolivia, tristeza (sadness), the opposite of felicidad (happiness), is used for illbeing, based on pictures of a sad face and a happy face, to which participants were invited to react.

In Malawi, akawo means a state of constant deprivation. It is explained that households described in this group lack peace of mind because they are always worried about how to make ends meet. In most akawo households, couples quarrel and fight a lot because they desire good lifestyles (umoyo sekuvi), but they lack the means. "It is not surprising that most men from these households are drinkers because they drink to forget home problems."

Women from Mbwadzimu village in Malawi say that they consider it illbeing when "people sit on the floor...people going to their gardens without taking any food...they have no latrines; they cook under the sun (have no kitchen), have no pit latrines; no change house (bathing place outside the house, constructed from grass) and no place drying wood."

In Barwa, Somaliland, extreme illbeing is defined as the experience of war and famine.

In India, the word dukhi (and in Bangladesh: asukhi), the opposite of sukhi, is close to illbeing: unhappiness, a bad condition of life in terms of experience, whether material, social or psychological.

In Chitragon, Bangladesh, illbeing is asokhi (unhappy) or kharap ahokha (bad condition), the opposite of khalid asokha (good condition).

In Bulgaria, one aspect of illbeing is a pervasive sense of loss of moving backward in time to an earlier century—from cultivation by peasants to having to cultivate by hand, from buying soap and bread to having to make and bake your own. This is described as going wild (poddzmyuim), being obliged to work in a manner considered humiliating, uncivilized and inefficient.

pay when there are days with an absolute lack of food. In many rural areas the poorest people rely on wild foods. Provision of food for children is a constant worry for parents, who themselves stint and starve. A mother in Nuevas Brisas del Mar, Ecuador says, “In the last two years our children leave for the school without having coffee. Sometimes I have some money but if I fix them some breakfast there is not enough for lunch.” Urban starvation is less dramatic or obvious than that in rural areas, but poor people in Jamaica say it is more prevalent. In urban areas in countries that have
Box 2.3. The Bad Life in Ethiopia

The following are literal translations of phrases used by poor men and women in Ethiopia to express their state of ill being.

"We are left tied like straw."
"Our life is empty; we are empty-handed."
"Living by scratching like a chicken."
"What is life when there is no friend or food."
"Life has made us ill."
"We are skinny."
"We are deprived and pale."
"We are above the dead and below the living."
"Hunger is a hyena."
"The poor is falling, the rich is growing."
"A life that cannot go beyond food."
"We simply watch those who eat."
"Difficulties have made us crazy."
"We sold everything we had and have become shelter-seekers."
"It is [like] sitting and dying alive."
"My relatives despise me and I cannot find them."
"Life is like sweeping ash."
"From hand to mouth."
"A life that is like being flogged."
"A life that makes you look older than your age."
"Just a sip and no more drop is left."
"If one is full, the other will not be full."
"Always call, never to be full."
"We have become empty like a hole."

undergone severe restructuring crises, study teams were shocked to learn of a quieter, hidden urban starvation. Some who starve are too proud and decent to beg or steal. In Ivanovo, Russia, "a woman told us that sometimes she did not have food for several days and was only drinking hot water and lying in bed so as not to spend energy." In Ethiopia a 30-year-old married man in Kebele 10 says, "We eat when we have, and we go to bed hungry when we don't."
Livelihood, Assets and Money. Uncertainty of livelihood sources and employment is virtually universal. Returns to work are low. Casual labor is both uncertain and badly paid. Insecurity from lack of assets and money is often mentioned, but more often implied. Money is needed for access to many services, especially health, education and transport; for bribes and fines; for daily necessities and often subsistence; for social occasions; and for clothing. Poor, ragged, secondhand and worn clothing is repeatedly given as a mark of being badly off. High-interest debt is common. Many needs and wants trace back to the lack of money.

Housing and Shelter. Virtually everywhere, shelter and housing are a source of discomfort and distress. Shacks, huts, houses or tenements are small. Many people crowd into small spaces. Possessions are insecure. Huts and shanties leak and flood, fall down, blow down, burn down or are knocked down. People have to stand when the ground gets wet. Dirt, filth and refuse are always there. Urban sanitation is often nonexistent or disgustingly bad. Sewers—where they exist—sometimes overflow and flood into huts, and health suffers as a result.

Physical Illbeing

Hunger, Pain and Discomfort. The physical illbeing of hunger and sickness, and the pain, stress and suffering they bring, are a common theme. Women in a group in Nigeria do not have sufficient breast milk to feed their babies. In Bedouin Egypt an older man says, “Lack of work worries me. My children are hungry and I tell them the rice is cooking, until they fall asleep from hunger.” In Ethiopia there is “burning hunger” and “fire of hunger.” Poor people are more often sick and injured, and are often sick for longer, and treated, if at all, later than the nonpoor. The reasons are many. Sickness itself is a frequent cause of suffering and impoverishment, leading to physical weakness, dependence and disability. Finally, poor people live in discomfort, in unhygienic, dangerous, dirty, badly serviced, and often polluted environments where they are vulnerable to many physical shocks, stresses and afflictions.

Exhaustion and Poverty of Time. The sheer exhaustion and lack of energy many poor people experience is easily overlooked. For many, their body is their main or only asset. It is uninsured. Shortage of food and sickness not only causes pain, but also weakens and devalues the asset. Those short of food are badly stressed by hard work. There are “lazy” poor people, but inactivity is often conservation of energy. Poor people are often described as tired, exhausted and worn out.

The increasing burdens of their expanded roles are driving many women deeper and deeper into physical exhaustion. These burdens also expose them to “time poverty,” meaning that they have little or no time to rest, reflect, enjoy social life, take part in community activities, or spend time in spiritual activities. Whereas men are often increasingly out of work, women are under more pressure.
Bad Social Relations: Exclusion, Rejection, Isolation and Loneliness

Exclusion takes many forms. Ignorance of or lack of fluency in a dominant majority language can be excluding. Minority groups around the world share the linguistic exclusion of women in Guadalupe, Bolivia who do not participate in public community activities because they feel embarrassed to speak their native language, Quechua. Denial of education can be excluding. The parents of Um Mohamed, a girl in El Gawaben, Egypt, forced her to leave school. "They sentenced me to death when they did that." In Brazil there is exclusion when parents try to enroll their children in public schools and are unable to find places for them.

Rejection is associated with poverty in many ways. The extremely poor are often rejected, even by those who are also poor. Two other forms of rejection are the abandonment of children and of old people. The feelings of rejection, isolation and loneliness are most often cruelly inflicted on those who suffer most in other ways.

Loneliness and lack of social support are no longer an uncommon experience of poor people generally, particularly the elderly. Those with little social support are described as being "poor in people." In rural Bulgaria, an old woman says, "Young people have nothing to do here. You can't imagine how I feel, as lonely as the dawn, but I was the first to prompt them to move to the city. I would have felt even worse watching them waste their lives here." Old men in Mbanda, Nigeria say, "We poor men have no friends. Our friend is the ground." This isolation is most acute for those who are very poor indeed and for those who are too weak to be able or to wish to assert themselves, especially the old. In Nuevas Brisas del Mar in urban Ecuador, where the team shared a meal with participants, an old man who had been present for three days and had hardly taken part at all was identified as "the voice of those without voice, the voice of hunger."

Self-exclusion occurs when inclusion is seen as dangerous or bad, and is a cost of a violent or abusive environment. Says a woman in Dock Sud, Argentina, "Now I am with my grandson. He is seven and the teachers in kindergarten tell me I have to let him be with other boys, but what for? To be a drug addict when he grows up? Here there are kids that are eight years old who do drugs, and after that they start to rob. No, I'd rather see him alone, isolated, like they say in school, but I'd rather have him at home with me; I take care of him."

Self-exclusion also occurs for reasons of shame. A poor person may not be invited to a wedding. If invited, a poor person may decide not to go because of being unable to appear and behave appropriately. Many of the self-excluded are the "invisible poor," especially the "new poor" who will not confess that they are poor. In a city in Bulgaria a poor man comments, "There was a man in our apartment building. A silent, shy fellow, always very neatly dressed. They found him dead in his apartment. The doctor said that he had become so feeble that he died of a common cold; they found just a piece..."
of stale bread in his flat. It's a pity we never spoke with him. He had dignity, that fellow."

**Insecurity, Vulnerability, Worry and Fear**

*There's great insecurity now. You can't make any plans. For all I know, tomorrow I might be told that we'll be laid off for a couple of months or that the factory is to shut down. We work three days a week even now, and you're in for a surprise every day.*

—Participant, discussion group of men and women, Kalofet, Bulgaria

*I am going to be poor and even hungry if I cannot labor in the coming years due to old age.*

—A resident, Ha Tinh, Vietnam

Insecurity and vulnerability are deeply embedded in the bad life. Insecurity comes through exposure to mishaps, stresses, and risks—to dangers in the physical environment, in society, in the economy, and in the administration and legal systems. Vulnerability comes because poor people are defenseless against damaging loss. Together these generate worry and fear: of natural disaster, of violence and theft, of loss of livelihood, of dispossession from land or shelter, of persecution by the police and powers that be, of debt, of sickness, of social ostracism, of the suffering and death of loved ones, of hunger and of destitution in old age.

Lack of confidence is frequently mentioned as a result of poverty. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the inability to find a job makes people feel worthless to themselves and their families.

**Powerlessness, Helplessness, Frustration and Anger**

Again and again, powerlessness seems to be at the core of the bad life. In Russia it is articulated as a complete sense of political impotence. More generally, powerlessness is described as the inability to control what happens, the inability to plan for the future, and the imperative of focusing on the present. In Zawyet Sultan, Egypt the condition known as *el-ghalban* and *ma'doom el bal*, words used for the poorest, mean helplessness and having no control over sources of one's living and therefore no control over one's destiny.

Time horizons are then short. Young people in Kalofet, Bulgaria say, "Each day is unpredictable—you can't make any plans, don't know what you're in for tomorrow." The sense of impotence is compounded when the future is seen as getting worse. Urban youth in Esmeraldas, Ecuador are reported as saying, "You can't think of the future because you can only see how to survive in the present." The report continues to say that everybody
in the group agrees that in the future there is only going to be more poverty. At this stage the facilitators had to stop the meeting because the youth got fed up.

Poor people want to be able to take the long view, but they cannot. Having to live “hand to mouth” is not a choice, but an immensely frustrating necessity. The experience is daily anxiety, and having to eat the moment they receive food or money.

Worry about the future, especially the future of children, coexists with concerns for the immediate present. According to the report of an interview with a woman in Pedda Kothapalli, India, “She is worried about the future of her children and the struggles they have to face once they grow up. Her immediate concern is to which house she should go for a loan of some food grains for their food that day.”

Part III. Psychological Experience of Wellbeing and Illbeing

The experience of wellbeing and illbeing is inextricably psychological. The dimensions of good and bad quality of life contribute to and are part of good and bad states of mind and being.

The Experience of Wellbeing: Peace of Mind, Happiness and Harmony

Being well means not to worry about your children, to know that they have settled down; to have a house and livestock and not to wake up at night when the dog starts barking; to know that you can sell your output; to sit and chat with friends and neighbors. That’s what a man wants.

—A poor man, Bulgaria

Interwoven with other dimensions of wellbeing—material, bodily, social, security, and freedom to choose and act—is psychological wellbeing. This is variously expressed as happiness, harmony, peace, freedom from anxiety, and peace of mind. From Novi Gorodok, Russia comes, “Wellbeing is a life free from daily worries about lack of money”; from Gowainghat, Bangladesh, “to have a life free from anxiety”; from Nova Califórnia, Brazil, that quality of life is “not having to go through so many rough spots” and “when there is cohesion, no quarrels, no hard feelings, happiness, in peace with life”; from Nigeria, “wellbeing is found in those that have peace of mind, living peacefully. It is to be filled with joy and
happiness. It is found in peace and harmony in the mind and in the community."

For many, too, a spiritual life and religious observance are woven in with other aspects of wellbeing. Poverty itself could get in the way. An old woman in Bower Bank, Jamaica says, "I got up this morning and all I want to do is read my Bible, but I share a room with my son and my grandchildren and all they do is make noise, I can't even get a little peace and quiet." In Padamukti, Indonesia, being able to make the pilgrimage to Mecca means much, as does having sholeh (dutiful and respectful) children who will look after their parents in old age and pray for them after they are dead. In Chittagong, Bangladesh, part of wellbeing is "always [being] able to perform religious activities properly." For older women in Cassava Piece, Jamaica, their church gives them a spiritual uplift and physical support. The importance to poor people of their sacred place—holy tree, stone, lake, ground, church, mosque, temple or pagoda—is repeatedly evident from their comparisons of institutions in which these frequently ranked high, if not highest.

The Experience of Illbeing: Humiliation, Shame, Anguish and Grief

Experiences of illbeing can be seen to combine and to compound each other in bad states of mind and being. Some connections stand out strongly. It is striking how often participants raise aspects of mental distress when describing the effects of poverty. Women in Tamale, Ghana, for example, connect poverty, anxiety, begging, shame, isolation and frustration. They explain that poverty creates "too much pressure on individuals and often renders a person mad with worry and anxiety." Begging is seen as a degrading activity, which brings about insult and disgrace to the family. This results in shyness within the community that in turn leads to frustration in life. Participants in different countries speak of mental stress and breakdown, depression, madness and suicide, together the antithesis of the wellbeing of peace of mind.

Humiliation, Shame and Stigma

The stigma of poverty is a recurring theme. As a consequence, poor people often try to conceal their poverty to avoid humiliation and shame.

One deeply felt deprivation is not being able to do what is customary in the society. Frequently cited, for example, is not being able to entertain visitors or enjoy social life. In Malawi, there is shame from not having toilets for visitors, or money to buy a coffin for burying a relative. In Beishweke in the Kyrgyz Republic, an elderly village man says, "In the Soviet times we had no idea what poverty was about, we were equally wealthy, and now we feel humiliated because we cannot afford to receive guests in our houses, or
visit friends and relatives. It was for that reason that we could not invite you [the study team] to our house when we first met."

Poor people sometimes feel shame and anger in accepting or having to accept alms or special treatment. In India this does not appear to apply to programs that give poor people well-recognized rights, like the government ration shops. Similarly in Viyalagoda, Sri Lanka, those who are poorer say it is a great help that their children are getting school books and uniforms; earlier their uniforms had been yellowish in color after several washings and they were ashamed. Now their children can sit together with others without any shame. By giving books and uniforms instead of money, the government has done a great thing.

By contrast, in Novy Gorodok, Russia even the most needy are humiliated to take poor quality goods provided for them by the welfare office. One participant commented, "[The food] is spoiled, and at prices higher than in the shops. I took a sack of flour once, and there were worms." Sexual abuse, with its physical violence as well as humiliation, is a greater threat for those in poverty, especially for women, given the places in which they live. In Dock Sud, Argentina most rapes are not reported because of shame. The same applies with sexual abuse, harassment and exploitation.

In Bulgaria, a participant in a discussion group of women says, "Only young girls aged under 20 or 22 can find a job. If they are 25 or older, nobody wants them. I can do the job of a waitress perfectly well, but the boss wanted somebody who'd do another job for him just as well."

Poor people often experience humiliation in their encounters with officials and those delivering services. In Chittagong, Bangladesh discussion groups report that "thana [administrative unit between the village and district level] officials are corrupt, unaccountable 'to anyone' for their dishonest acts and only show 'special respect' to the rich." Color prejudice is mentioned in Brazil and Ecuador.

Appearances and clothes, as well as being an important part of physical wellbeing, are mentioned as important for self-respect and, conversely, they can be a source of shame. In Etropole, Bulgaria "people who cannot afford warm clothes for the winter go to work. Then they come back and stay at home under a pile of blankets, shivering with cold. They don't go out. They are ashamed to meet other people. If they run into a friend and are invited for a drink they must refuse. So they would rather not go out at all." In the Kyrgyz Republic a middle-aged woman says, "My daughter came from school crying. Somebody at school called her a beggar, because she was wearing the jacket that we received as humanitarian aid. She refused to go to school."

**Anguish, Loss and Grief**

Anguish, loss and grief are implicit in so many life histories of poor people, and these speak through the pages of the case studies. Sickness and death are
very frequent. Anguish, when loved ones are sick and treatment is known but cannot be afforded, is found in all societies, and not only among poor people. For many participants, though, this experience is common, acute and agonizing, and for many it comes more and more often. Especially in Africa, the rising incidence of HIV/AIDS and malaria has combined with shrinking access to affordable treatment.

Psychological illbeing is marked where there has been a sharp decline in the levels of living and wellbeing, and where people from former middle classes have become impoverished. This is most notable among the former middle classes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Kyrgyz Republic, Russia and Uzbekistan who are now the “new poor.” The Bosnia and Herzegovina National Report speaks of “psychological ill health” in all the communities. In one, the psychological effects of economic misery are listed as “one’s psychological health, distancing oneself or withdrawing from others, tensions between people, irritability, insecurity, apathy, nervousness, monotony, and dissatisfaction.”

The burden of war and civil disturbance for those caught up in them is expressed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, in Bijeljina, especially by anguished women whose husbands and sons were fighting. The trauma of refugees and others who have suffered from violence is an extreme form of mental distress. Instant impoverishment often combines with fear and the anguish of loss, especially when family members are at risk or have been killed. Just how terrible the effects can be is expressed by one older woman in Bijeljina: “I had to send a husband and two sons to the front lines and wait for them to return—or not. I did not think about eating, sleeping, dressing or anything. I would lie down and awake in tears. What have we lived to experience?” For her, spiritual poverty is more devastating than her material poverty: “You can never recover from spiritual impoverishment.”

In the former Soviet region, participants express a profound sense of loss regarding their earlier level of living, when they had guaranteed jobs, free education and health care, social safety nets and recreation. Nostalgia is too weak a word to describe what they feel. At the same time, as with other loss and bereavement, they know it has gone forever. “Those who don’t feel sorry about the collapse of the Soviet Union have no heart, but those who think that it may be restored have no brain,” says an elderly man in the Kyrgyz Republic.

'Bold figures of life expectancy do not show what they mean in human terms. The horrors, separations and losses in war and civil disorder have become the commonplaces of journalism and television. The avoidable loss of loved ones in the quiet crisis of poverty is on a much larger scale, but unseen. The experience is worse when the bereaved are denied the last rites, grieving and consolation, which are customary and due in their society, because of the simple fact of their own poverty.'
Table 2.1 Dislikes and Fears of Children in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having to drop out of school, special classes closing down</td>
<td>Sickness of teacher, causing class to close down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My forthcoming school exams</td>
<td>Failing to move up a grade, having to repeat a class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting in the community</td>
<td>Sniffing heroin, drug addiction, young drug addicts stealing and robbing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless people being cold during storms</td>
<td>Gambling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug addiction in the neighborhood</td>
<td>Fighting and quarreling in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambling</td>
<td>Robbery, especially of dogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loan sharks</td>
<td>Street accidents happening to children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaking roofs in the neighborhood</td>
<td>Neighborhood fires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flooding of the neighborhood and houses</td>
<td>A dirty and polluted neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A dirty and polluted neighborhood</td>
<td>Prostitution among young people in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That our house might collapse</td>
<td>Spread of AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends being too poor to afford new clothes</td>
<td>Sickness of my family members or mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood children dropping out of school and working hard</td>
<td>Fights and conflict between my mother and father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drunken men beating up their wives and children</td>
<td>Divorce of my parents, family splitting up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarrelling between my mother and father</td>
<td>My mother running off with another man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That my mother works too hard</td>
<td>Sale of our house to repay a debt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That my family might break up</td>
<td>Having our house demolished and cleared away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having no money to buy rice</td>
<td>Having a roof that leaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having no money to pay for rent or medical treatment</td>
<td>Having no house of our own, having to share a room with other families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having nobody to look after me if my parents are sick</td>
<td>Having no money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being robbed, break-ins and theft</td>
<td>Being unable to get a job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having our house and neighborhood cleared away</td>
<td>Rich people scolding the poor people they hire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rich looking down on the poor people</td>
<td>Richer families not allowing us to watch their TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rich people living in luxury, not helping poor people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Richer people looking down at us</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Illbeing of Children

Parents are again and again preoccupied with securing a good life for their children. So the children's own experience and view of the bad life have a double importance: for themselves as children and for adults as their parents and guardians.

In Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnamese children summarize their feelings about the consequences of being poor as deprivation and resentment (see table 2.1). They resent that they cannot go to school on their own without the money to take them on outings. Boys and girls over 10 resent being scolded because of indebtedness and the failure to repay loans. The boys say that everyone in the family is working, but there is still not enough to eat; that they have to accept beatings from others and can do nothing in return; and that they are always blamed when something is stolen. Boys under 10 cannot have a birthday party like other children. Girls under 10 are teased by richer children because they are poor. And girls over 10 resent having to agree with richer people and act as their inferiors, even if what they [the rich people] say is wrong.

The vivid directness of what girls and boys see and experience as the bad life is revealing. The Ho Chi Minh City report concludes that "what the young emphasize more than any other group...is the effect of poverty on the family itself. They see poor families as tense, conflictual and subject to breakdown." It is perhaps no surprise that family harmony matters much to children, but worthy of note that they see a link between poverty and bad relations in the family. Also, both girls and boys mention the behavior of the rich, and being looked on badly and being treated badly by them—something that adults, perhaps through prudence, mention only occasionally.

For their part, the parents' pain when they cannot provide for and look after their children is shown to be a big part of adult illbeing.

In Muynak, Uzbekistan in the extreme of distress, there is an ultimate way out: "There are families who do not eat and drink in three days. People die of hunger. For example, Ayagan was a good guy. He could not provide his family with food, his children cried and then he shot himself."

Reflections

In understanding what a good experience of life is, there is perhaps no end, no final answer. But if development is to enhance the wellbeing of poor people in their own terms, there is much to reflect on in what they say.

The discussions in Ethiopia generated the list of dire statements in box 2.3. Yet one of the team leaders in Ethiopia, on approaching a very poor, remote community, heard singing and dancing. This can jolt us into recognizing that there are many good things, each in its own culture, which contribute to wellbeing: not only singing, dancing and music, but also festivals, ceremonies and celebrations; good things in their seasons; love,
kindness and sacrifice; and religious and spiritual practices and experiences. But to many of those who are most deprived, these fulfills are diminished or denied.

The overarchling questions are then whether, where and why human wellbeing is being enhanced or eroded; whether for many millions the singing and dancing are dying or renewing; whether the conditions for material, bodily, social, mental and spiritual wellbeing are improving or getting worse; and above all how to enable poor people to gain for themselves more of the good life to which they aspire.
Chapter 3

The Struggle for Livelihoods

Summary

Adequate and secure livelihoods emerge as a central concern to poor people's well-being. In rural areas much hardship is linked to reduced access to land, bad soils, adverse weather, lack of fertilizer and other inputs, deficiencies of transport and marketing, and overexploitation of common resources such as fish, pastureland and forests. In both countryside and cities, people speak of lack of permanent employment and reliance on badly paid and unreliable casual labor and petty trades. Participants also frequently mention harassment and corruption from officials as well as mistreatment from employers and having no recourse to redress grievances.

To cope with such precarious livelihood conditions, poor people often struggle to diversify their sources of income and food: they work on the land and in quarries and mines; they hunt down temporary jobs and sell an endless variety of goods on the streets; they do piecework in factories and from homes; they patch together remittances; and they cultivate home gardens. Many poor people count on local moneylenders and shopkeepers for credit in emergencies and during lean times; few have access to formal credit and savings services. With opportunities so limited, many are driven and drawn into livelihood activities that are to various degrees dangerous, illegal, and antisocial, including theft, drug dealing, sex work, trade in women and children, and child labor.

A large majority of men and women in the study view better livelihood opportunities as distant from them and economic conditions as worsening. In parts of Asia and a few communities elsewhere, however, people see poverty as declining. In Vietnam poor people link this improvement to market and land reforms, and successful diversification of income.

Case studies of those who have managed to improve their well-being indicate that entrepreneurship is the most frequent path out of poverty. Having multiple sources of income is also characteristic of many people who move out of poverty. In addition to entrepreneurship, these income streams include wages and salaries, benefits from family, agricultural earnings, and access to land.
the lists among both men and women. As one man observes, “We used to be good farmers. Now, only those who can afford the money travel to Igrita to rent land to farm.” In the village of Bedea, Egypt people tell researchers that steep climbs in land rents and payment terms are leading to dramatic increases in landlessness. Farmers there say they are only left with wage labor, or what they call agir, a derogatory term that implies exploitation by landowners.

In Bangladesh, India and Vietnam lack of access to land is identified as a particularly important cause of poverty in several of the rural communities. Across many of these villages, people indicate that households without access to land are especially vulnerable to deepening cycles of indebtedness from which it is very difficult to escape.

In Latin America land titling insecurities emerge as an important hardship for several communities. Farmers feel trapped by land insecurity, ambiguous relationships with land owners, and vicious cycles of subsistence production, loans, repayments, and more loans. In Bolivia, for instance, a farmer explains,

Ten years ago land titles weren’t a problem. Now the owners have consolidated the lands telling us to work tranquilly and that they would take responsibility for getting us the titles. Since these promises were not kept, the farmers who rent distrust the owners who want to take possession of all the land and throw them out, and for this reason land titles are an important worry.

**Diminishing Inputs and Returns**

*Cotton and cattle used to be worth more, and there used to be credit.*

—Participant, discussion group of men and women, Argentina

*Price of fertilizer incompatible with price of rice.*

—A group of older men, Galih Pakuwon, Indonesia

Discussion groups in quite varying contexts report that farming is less profitable than in the past. A frequent concern is the high cost of inputs, which in some countries is traced to reduced government subsidies for seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and sometimes other needs such as tools, machinery, and medicines for animals. Men and women also frequently mention problems with getting fair prices for their goods and with accessing markets and transport.

High input costs are most striking in the rural reports from Africa and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, but can also be found in the reports from Asia. Discussion groups from a number of rural communities in Africa, and
particularly Malawi and Zambia, link increased hunger and food insecurity to the higher costs of inputs in recent years, especially of fertilizer. In Zambia, where problems of fertilizer are mentioned more often than hunger among discussion groups, a man from Nchimishi explains that “the major cause of hunger here is the lack of fertilizer.”

Among rural villages in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, steep production declines are especially associated with the collapse of collective farms and the system of centrally managed markets for agricultural inputs and irrigation and for distribution of produce. In Weerapandiyan in Sri Lanka farmers say that the high cost of inputs and equipment is driving them to abandon agriculture and sell their lands, or to shift to other often less lucrative crops that require fewer inputs. In Indonesia poor people describe input problems in terms of “lack of capital,” or not having the cash, tools and inputs needed for agriculture. Farmers in many of the rural communities of Latin America link production problems to lack of credit and indicate that it used to be more widely available.

In many countries, poor people also report difficulties with accessing markets and getting fair prices for their goods. In four of the rural communities visited in Sri Lanka, for instance, farmers mention a shortage of markets and getting squeezed by middlemen as important problems. In Thailand farm workers complain that the economic recession has sharply reduced the prices of rice and rubber, greatly cutting demand for agricultural labor. In the Kyrgyz Republic during the Soviet era, consumption cooperatives (Potrebsoyuz) purchased farm produce, but now individual farmers have to find buyers and “often end up selling their products to wholesale traders at very low prices.” Reaching markets and getting fair prices are also problems for several villages visited in Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador and Jamaica. The rural poor in Argentina indicate that the price of crops such as cotton has fallen, as have earnings from cattle and animal skins, and they point to these price trends as a major reason why “we are worse today.”

**Few Institutional Supports**

We wish...we had the mandate to caution him.

—A villager referring to the poor performance of the local agricultural extension agent, Khweela, Malawi

Although the study was not designed to evaluate particular services, it is notable that few villages mention agricultural extension services as institutions of local importance. Where they exist, these services are often viewed as unresponsive.

Residents in some communes of Ha Tinh Province in Vietnam complain that extension services have to be paid in advance rather than on credit and that the new seeds and pesticides being promoted do not perform as well as traditional crops and husbandry. All the same, they would value better guidance on pest control and training on new agricultural techniques. In
Nchimasho, Zambia people say the local extension officer sells very expensive but ineffective drugs to fight tick-borne diseases in their cattle, but “the cattle continued to die.”

Although there may be difficulties getting external help, poor people frequently value their own local organizations highly. In Somaliland poor people sometimes consider their local pastoral and farming groups among the most important local institutions. Members are involved collectively in livestock rearing, managing irrigation, and transporting and marketing produce.

Common Property Resources under Stress

We know that cutting down trees will cause water shortages and that making charcoal can cause forest fires, but we have no choice. Because we lack food, we have to exploit the forest...

—A resident of Ha Tinh, Vietnam

Earlier we worked from morning till evening, and now young people do not work...if they start to earn something for the family—for example, catching fish—the militia will not leave them in peace.

—A poor youth, Muynak, Uzbekistan

Many poor rural women and men rely for all or part of their livelihoods on common property or publicly owned resources, such as forests, woodlands, lakes, rivers and common grazing lands. Some of the very poor in Malawi fetch and sell river sand, and in Kalofer, Bulgaria a participant in a discussion group of men and women commented that “eld people survive by grazing animals in the woods.” In most cases, however, availability of these resources is in crisis because of restricted access, overexploitation or both.

In Somaliland access to grazing land and the need for alternative fodder appear as important priorities for the poor. Researchers note that grazing lands are becoming increasingly eroded, which in turn has compelled some landowners to use common lands in the dry season for grazing rather than their own lands. Poor people think privatization of common lands has intensified pressures on the remaining common areas.

Fishing communities in countries and conditions as varied as Bangladesh, Ecuador, Egypt. Malawi and Uzbekistan report serious problems with declining fish stocks, increased competition, new regulations and diminishing wage labor opportunities on boats.

The reasons for declining stocks vary. In Thailand they are tied to pesticide runoff (Nakorn Patorn) and wastewater from processing plants (Kaosong). In some African communities people blame the shortage on over-fishing and point to growing populations and more commercial fishing. A youth from Mangochi, Malawi informed the researchers that dwindling stocks there are due to greater population pressures and the introduction of
large shipping vessels that use nets to "catch even the smallest fish. The fish are not given enough time to breed.... In the past we only caught fish with bait and hook."

To preserve fish stocks and allow for their recovery, many local authorities are requiring fishing permits and placing temporary moratoria on fishing near the coasts, which are popular breeding grounds. Poor fishing communities seem especially hard hit by these regulations as well as by increased competition from large commercial shippers. In the fishing village of Borg Meghezel, Egypt a two-month fishing prohibition in early summer interrupts livelihoods not only for the fishermen but also for those involved as merchants, boat owners, and drivers. In Bangladesh fishing opportunities for the poorest are heavily restricted by government leasing requirements affecting fishing rights on all water bodies; in many cases, the only opportunities left for the poor are to work as day laborers in fishing boats. From Bangladesh and Egypt come reports of poor fishermen going out in the dark and risking physical assault from permit owners and the hazards of working at night.

In all regions communities are experiencing the effects of deforestation, and poor people see the loss of forest areas and its impacts as threatening their livelihoods and food security. In most places where the problem is identified, the poor attribute deforestation to human pressures and lack of alternative livelihoods, fuel and food. In Adaboya, Ghana the researchers indicate that economic hardships and the lack of jobs push many into charcoal burning and cutting wood to sell. Similarly poor people rely heavily on firewood and raffia collecting, charcoal burning, and hunting to generate income in the highland forest communities of Ha Tinh, Vietnam.

Women and men acknowledge the pressures that their activities place on the local environment, but they see few alternatives. They also describe a host of indirect effects from the loss of tree cover, such as damage to local water supplies, more intense flooding, and in a few cases, adverse changes in weather. In Gowainghat, Bangladesh, for example, deforestation contributes greatly to erosion of cropland and of earthen roads and embankments.

**Migration and Remittances**

_Most men now abandon their homes, women now work the fields... Women have taken charge of everything. They pay heavily and endure this life._

—Discussion group participants,
Cuenca, Ecuador

In struggling farm, pastoral and fishing communities across the study countries, people make numerous references to seasonal and permanent migration of both men and women who travel to areas with greater opportunities for work as wage laborers and in petty trades and domestic services. Paradoxically, although poor people often acknowledge that the remittances
from such work are crucial, they largely hold negative views of migration as a livelihood strategy.

The rural poor view migration both as a cause and an effect of poverty, and discussion groups by and large focus on migration’s harmful aspects. Men and women in Argentina and Ecuador speak of the hardships of leaving children behind to be raised by women alone or increasingly by grandparent. In Kehelpannala, Sri Lanka researchers reported a widespread perception that overseas employment is devastating for families, especially children. A discussion group of men in Tabe Ere, Ghana feel that security has declined in the village because adult children have migrated to urban areas in search of jobs rather than staying to help parents in their old age.

Poor people widely mention and greatly value remittances from family members who have migrated. Most families in the villages of La Calera and Junqal, Ecuador, for instance, are said to have male wage earners in the cities who provide their primary source of subsistence. People report that remittances from overseas are very important to communities in Bangladesh, Jamaica and Uzbekistan.

Although rarer, the rural poor sometimes consider migration a stepping-stone to opportunities and a better life, but even in these cases many hardships are often acknowledged. A 30-year-old builder from the village of Otrimgaly, Uzbekistan—where women make up 70 percent of the population—says he migrates for two or three months at a time and that a “person who learned some trade will survive.” However, he also indicates that some risks are involved because “now the police are checking the residence stamp everywhere.” Migrants often find themselves doing the hardest work: in Uzbekistan this includes difficult jobs on construction projects and hauling carts inside markets.

Understandably the men and women who have managed to move out of poverty who were interviewed for this study often share quite positive experiences with migration, such as the story in box 3.1.

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**Box 3.1: From Rickshaw Puller to Landlord**

A Tale of Entrepreneurship from Bangladesh

Mahood Rab was destitute when he arrived in the slums of Chittagong City with his wife at the age of 18. He left his village after his father died, and his family had become impoverished covering medical expenses. When Mahood arrived in the city, he worked as a rickshaw puller, and his wife took jobs as a maidservant in several homes. Through hard work, and with his own and his wife’s savings, he was finally able to buy a rickshaw. Within a year, he owned four. Today, at age 50, Mahood owns eight rickshaws, but does not rely just on this business. He took out a loan from Proshika (a national NGO) and rents five houses he built in another slum area. Mahood shared with the researchers that due to his wealth everyone knows him, and he is among those who are respected and take part in the major decisions of the neighborhood.
Diversified Livelihoods in Cities and Countryside

I got the capital for my fritter [fried dough] business from my husband.... In times of shocks like famine, I use the business money to buy foods and so shocks are not such a blow on our family.

—A woman, Chitambi, Malawi

With so few prospects for sufficient and reliable incomes, researchers heard countless reports of men and women working harder and diversifying livelihood activities to make ends meet. With a decline in opportunities for men in agriculture and for permanent employment, women across the world report taking on work outside the home to bring food to the table. “We [women] are getting out of the house, learning to knit, to sew...to make a vegetable garden.... We can contribute a few pesos to the house, just like my husband,” explains a woman from Isla Talavera, Argentina. (See also chapter 6, “Gender Relations in Troubled Transition.”)

In places where formal sector jobs used to be available and provided adequate earnings, many people don’t consider their patching together of temporary jobs to be real employment. Bundles of livelihood activities can sometimes be a way forward—as shown in a section below on individual breakthroughs. For many, however, the push to diversify income and assets is just a coping strategy that involves constant juggling and struggle. In Guwara, India, discussion groups had a term—"baaik," or caprice—to describe their unstable work and the practice of jumping from one occupation to another.

Diversification strategies are part and parcel of rural as well urban livelihoods. In remote villages of Lao Cai, Vietnam families report:

- Collecting and selling minor forest products such as medicinal herbs and bamboo shoots.
- Hunting and selling birds, mammals and reptiles.
- Specializing in growing particular medicinal herbs that few other people grow.
- Making tools, equipment and household domestic items.
- Making food products to market, such as maize and buckwheat cakes, bean curd and wine.
- Making cloth and clothes.

The push to diversify even touches those in the study with permanent employment—teachers, civil servants, mechanics and shop attendants. They often indicate that their wages are much too low to move their families out of poverty, so they take on extra work. This is particularly frequently noted in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and in Latin America. While mining is the main enterprise in Etiopole, Bulgaria, for instance, most also engage in subsistence agriculture on weekends and holidays, and some hold second jobs as security guards (men), shop attendants (women) and waitresses (young women).
Getting Hired—Connections Needed

You can't do anything unless you have friends in high places. Connections. You're not judged on your own personal authority but on the authority of someone else who might not even be an authority.

—A young man, Krasna Poliana, Bulgaria

In quite varied contexts, participants talk about the need to have connections, especially to find work. In Dahshour, Egypt people say there is "much bitterness" because any opportunities that may come along for a better or more permanent job from a wasta (or middleman) are always taken by the rich. Similarly, villagers in Phwetekere, Malawi indicate that better-off people do not face difficulties in finding jobs because they are "often well educated and well networked." A woman from Phwetekere observes that they "change jobs as if they are pairs of trousers."

Discrimination adds another obstacle to finding work for ethnic and caste groups. "There are vacancies at the labor office, but once they see you're dark they turn you down," exclaims a Roma man from Bulgaria. The researchers note that in all of the sites where there is a large Roma population, 80 percent of the males and 100 percent of the females are unemployed, most for as long as three years. In Manjhar, India people identify caste-based discrimination as a problem when seeking jobs, and blacks in Brazil and Ecuador mention similar obstacles.

Lawlessness on the Job

I worked six years in a company that did not pay me correctly. So I sued them and they threatened to kill me. I had to hide.

—A poor man, Sacadura Cabral, Brazil

To be able to open this coffee place I had a very big problem with the sanitary authorities.... They tormented me and tormented me until in the end we settled it for 300 DM. Whenever they see us they want bribes.

—A 49-year-old woman, urban Bulgaria

All too often poor people report experiencing law and law enforcement not as a means to a better life, but as obstacles. They say a key challenge is staying ahead of public authorities and well-organized criminals bent on shutting them down, intimidating them, or demanding bribes.

Municipal regulations and licensing make many creative economic activities illegal. In Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam those without permanent resident status are denied access to permanent jobs. Street vendors and bicycle rickshaw drivers mention that they are finding it increasingly difficult to earn a living because of increased competition and new laws limiting the streets where they can work.
Because poor women most commonly run petty trades, they are often most exposed to harassment. In Olmalo, Uzbekistan a vendor named Nigora tells researchers of a policeman who threw away her goods because she was trading in an unauthorized area. She tried to move the officer to pity by crying and shouting curses and explaining that her husband had not worked for three months. She then teamed up with five or six other women to pool a large bribe. In exchange, the policeman now looks the other way and has made sure that the tax collector does not disturb them.

In fact, the need to pay bribes to stay in business came up quite often in the research. A tea shop owner from Patna, India complains that he paid a succession of “taxes” after opening his shop at the railway station. The researchers report that “he started earning more in his new occupation, making a profit of Rs 150-200 per day, but had to pay ‘rangdaari tax’ [money extorted by force] of Rs 25-50 to the contractor or to the constables of the Railway Police Force. Besides, the officials and contractors used to have tea at his shop, but never bothered to pay.”

The particular problem of delays in the payment of wages and payments-in-kind cut across rural and urban sites in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. “We don’t work there because they don’t pay people for their work,” says a participant from a group of unemployed young men in Ulughboz, Uzbekistan. People say that plenty of jobs are available in the local sovkhoz (collective farm), but wages are never paid on time and they feel discouraged from taking the jobs. “Why should I get all that vodka and mayonnaise when I need to buy a medicine for my daughter?” complains a father from Ivanovo, Russia about how he is being paid.

Seasonal Fluctuations

Nothing to do during three to four months of rainy/stormy season.

—A group of young women, Ampenan Utara, Indonesia

It is much easier after spring—there are jobs offered if you are not lazy. Well, they are not real jobs, with regular wages and social security, but you won’t die from hunger.

—A 43-year-old man from Plovdiv, Bulgaria

The few jobs that are created in the area are seasonal—only when the tourist season is at its peak.

—A poor youth, Little Bay, Jamaica

Rural and also urban opportunities and rewards for work can be sharply seasonal. During the rains in Somaliland, livestock sales plummet and prices for food rise sharply, putting at a disadvantage those poorer people who need to sell animals to buy food. The Bangladesh study finds a widely varying seasonal range of wages, at one site going from Taka 100–140 per day at the
time of harvest to Taka 40–60 per day in the slack season, and elsewhere as low as Taka 15–20 per day.

Fishing is reported to be highly seasonal in Bangladesh and Egypt. Women in Madaripur, Bangladesh report that during the rainy season they cannot work in the brick field or chip bricks or sell dried fish. Seasonal rural migration of men and families in Ghana, India, Nigeria, and elsewhere is a widespread strategy with its own stresses of travel and uncertainty, and of leaving behind children, the sick, the disabled, and the very old to manage on their own.

The timing of school expenditures is also an issue, coming as it sometimes does at bad times of the year for some poor people. As reported in Vietnam, at times of seasonally heavy labor demand there is an incentive to withdraw children from school to help.

Shortages of food and having to stint and starve are often mentioned. When debts are assumed as a means to survive the bad times, they carry over: their repayment in Bangladesh is reported to take up much of poor families’ income in the better seasons. In the bad months many of the poor in Bangladesh and in other countries mortgage and later lose their land to feed themselves and survive. In the bad months poor people become poorer.

**Money in Short Supply**

_A man is ashamed to go to the neighborhood. You can’t ask for loans from everyone. Times are hard for everybody._

—A discussion group participant, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

_Now we don’t even have one cent in our pocket._

—Participant, discussion group of men and women, Moreno, Argentina

With some exceptions, people in the study report that they have no or only limited access to banks and credit schemes. Men and women say they need credit not only to improve their livelihoods and for emergencies but also sometimes for daily expenditures during difficult periods. When networks of relatives and friends are not sufficient, poor people say that, to survive, they frequently turn to moneylenders, shopkeepers and pawnbrokers.

**Informal Credit**

_When we want a small loan, we do not have to go after people, and we do not have to waste our time at the bank._

—A woman from Wewala, Sri Lanka speaking of the local credit group run by women
There are six of us in the family—one pension and two incomes—but all irregular. We live from the first of the month to the first of the month. Sometimes we borrow from friends, but only from those we trust and who trust us.

—A poor resident of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Local moneylenders appear with surprising frequency on poor people’s lists of institutions of local importance, but views on whether they play a positive or negative role vary widely. In Kebele 11, Ethiopia, a group of young males say the local moneylender is their only hope for starting a small trading business some day. Researchers in Pegambiran, Indonesia note in the report that “when members of the community required a significantly large amount of cash (such as for business capital, school fees, hospitalization expenses), the *limbah darat* (literally ‘bloodsucker’) or loan sharks were the available alternative.”

Some say that they appreciate and count on the speedy service and flexibility that moneylenders provide: they often extend loans on the spot without collateral requirements and allow payments to be made in kind, with cash, or through the provision of labor. Others, however, are very critical of moneylenders for charging high interest rates, and they fear the consequences for not making payments. In Khalijun, Bangladesh elderly men say they have full trust in the local *mobazan* (moneylender), but others express bitterness because he forcefully evicts people from their homes if payments are delayed.

Informal rotating credit groups play valued roles in several communities visited in Africa and Eastern Europe and across Asia. There appear to be endless varieties of these groups. Credit group members usually know one another well—either as friends, neighbors, colleagues, or relatives—and they decide collectively the amount they will contribute monthly. One arrangement is that the group leader gives the collection to a different member of the group each month, who may use the funds in any way he or she wants. The credit groups in Egypt are most popular with women, who might join a group to buy clothes, prepare a daughter’s trousseau, save for a washing machine, and so forth. Poor women of Beda rank the credit group among the most important local institutions, along with the health unit and the schools. In Ethiopia, the local rotating credit group is called the *idir* and is also identified as a very important community institution that focuses on covering funeral expenses.

Worldwide, local shop owners are also highly valued for lending food and other items and, quite often, cash on credit. In Pegambiran, Indonesia, local shops and kiosks are viewed as the most effective institution in reaching poor people and extending timely support at a “meaningful level.” In Russia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, credit from shopkeepers can be very important because of problems of wage arrears and being paid in kind.
Study participants widely report that they secure emergency cash by selling off personal property. A young man from a discussion group in Dahshour Village, Egypt explains that “my wife was ill and I had no money to take her to the doctor and get medicines, and it was impossible to wait, so I just sold a couple of pots to solve this problem.” A 47-year-old miner from Kok Yangak, Kyrgyz Republic confides that “I've been working in this mine for 27 years and I had some property, but sold it all when they stopped paying us. All we have in our house now are two beds with mattresses, and my wife and son are hungry all the time.”

**Formal Credit and Banks**

*While the rich get loans, the poor get consideration for loans.*

—A poor resident in Ha Tinh, Vietnam

*Everything I have is at home. I have no money in the bank, no savings—you should be crazy to keep money in the bank with that inflation—so if somebody steals my animals, I will be izgorja [burned out].*

—An older poor woman, Etropole, Bulgaria

*I do not have a chair. I cannot be given a loan. What will they confiscate from me?*

—A villager from Mbwadzulu, Malawi

Many people report they have no access to banks or to savings and credit schemes, and where these services are available, their quality can be quite mixed. More favorable reports on credit schemes can be found in Thailand and in Vietnam. Many poor people view credit as a strategy for improving their livelihoods, but say they will require much better access to savings and credit services and more favorable terms than are currently available.

Even where opportunities to borrow are growing, it can be difficult for poor people to access credit programs because of unrealistic collateral requirements and excessive interest rates as well as corruption among lending officials. In the four communities visited in Jal Abad, Kyrgyz Republic, for instance, discussion group participants argued that long-term loans could be a way out of their difficulties, but that loans were now only available for those with money, and lending officials expected bribes.

Moreover, concerns about falling into debt run deep. The act of borrowing itself can set people on a downward slide rather than providing them a bridge to a better life. Difficulties related to indebtedness are mentioned most often in Asia. In Thailand the poor report that overborrowing from rural banks is common, which can then trigger a vicious cycle of further borrowing at higher rates from local moneylenders. Women in a discussion group in
Tanjungrejo in Malang, Indonesia say they are stuck in their livelihood of scavenging because they have fallen deep into debt and lack money to start a business. Moreover, their school-age children have been forced to drop out of school to work as scavengers as well. As the local researchers indicate, “That was the only way possible for them to survive.”

In Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam people speak highly of the increased availability of low-interest loans in recent years and of the official credit program (HEPR). Nevertheless, people still have concerns about uneven coverage, collateral requirements, and exclusive focus on income-generating projects. Loan funds also are badly needed for health care, hospital fees, children’s education, and house repairs. In addition, permanent resident requirements further hinder poor people’s access to credit and, in some cases, might disqualify entirely some of the neediest families. The researchers note that more than 100,000 loans were made under the official program, but that this amounted to just 16 percent in the district with the greatest coverage.

People in the Baan Kang Sadao, Thailand discussion groups generally regard with favor the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAC). They praise the agency for giving loans during the recent economic crisis and for allowing payments on the principal to be deferred. In Baan Chai Pru all groups but one ranked the BAC high and informed the researchers that its officers “pay attention to their work, understand the villagers’ livelihood and are flexible...and that they can negotiate with the BAC about every issue except the issue of interest.”

**Livelihoods That Steal the Future**

All we need is funds—employment first of all, then we can go on with a thing. No work causes other problems and makes you think evil things.

—A man, Thompson Pen, Jamaica

Because of unemployment, young people drink to excess, commit crime, rape, steal livestock.

—Participant, discussion group of men and women, Ak Kiya village, Kyrgyz Republic

I’ve worked for 23 years, and I’ve never touched somebody else’s property. But just look at my leg now—it was broken when I was stealing manganese from the railway station; the train pulled off just as I was trying to climb on board. Do you think that I would risk my life for nothing if I had a job? Do you know what it’s like to have your children crying because they are hungry?

—A Roma, Bulgaria
Criminality is a result of poverty. When you’re hungry, you have to find a way. Hunger doesn’t ask.
—Discussion group participant, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Participants confide that sometimes desperation and hunger lead to anti-social and illegal activities. “A man loses his head with unemployment. He risks everything and gets the guts to do things he never thought he would,” says a man from Sacadura Cabral, Brazil. For some, the conditions of their lives drive them to steal, drink, take drugs, sell sex, abandon their children, commit suicide, or trade in women and children. And then the household and often the wider community must face the fear and anxiety that these means of coping bring in their wake.

In many communities the poor mention rising crime and sometimes relate this to deepening poverty and hunger. Poor men and women also report that they are frequently targets of violence and theft, including organized crime. In Nchimishi, Zambia people make a direct link between food insecurity and increased theft. Hungry people are said to steal crops from fields and granaries in Zambia. At one community in Indonesia all groups report that crime has risen, and the older women’s group says that because of poverty, many people’s minds become cloudy, and this makes them look for an opportunity to solve their problems by stealing or cheating.

Illegal activities can also be stepping stones in the struggle to escape from poverty. Vo, a young man from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam came from such a poor family that for his wedding there was no party or celebration. Later, one of his economic activities was a small but illegal business trading in government coupons. Through this he saved enough to launch a successful and legal small business making paper money that people burn for their ancestors.

For some, the main sources of livelihood are drug-related. Although marijuana cultivation is known to be illegal in Jamaica, many rely on the income it brings. In Brazil and elsewhere in the region, people single out drug trafficking as a major source of violence. A women’s group observes, “There is almost no violence when there are no drugs in the middle.” In Thailand some discussion groups identify drugs as important problems, leading to “ petty larceny” and harming the image of their communities.

Poor people frequently report that sex work is an outcome of poverty, especially in Africa and Asia. References to prostitution and the spread of HIV/AIDS are most common in Africa, although also mentioned in Asia and Latin America. In Adaboya, Ghana some participants report receiving remittances from daughters engaged in commercial sex work in other parts of the country, and they point out that some of their daughters have contracted AIDS and returned to spread it to other “innocent people in the community.” In Khwalala, Malawi discussion group participants
describe how prostitution has led to family breakdowns, the spread of HIV/AIDS, and having to cope with the devastating phenomenon of large numbers of orphans.

People in other regions as well report male, female and child prostitution. In Sri Lanka participants from the tourist area of Galle indicate that some poor families receive income by supplying male prostitutes to tourists and by allowing some of their children to be adopted by French and German families. One man says that his son is with a man in France, and they send money when they visit the country every year; other villagers share similar stories. In the three communities visited in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam the researchers were told of a growing phenomenon of girls being "sold" to Taiwanese men either in marriage or for temporary relationships (see box 3.2). Often these girls are under 18 years old, and brokers mediate deals between the families. Foreign couples seeking to adopt also look to brokers, with payments of $50 to $500 per baby reported.

In every region people mention child labor. Discussion groups in two sites in Egypt report sending children to work as one way of coping with declines in household wellbeing. In Dahshour, for example, children work in a storehouse packing vegetables for sale. During periods of disaster in Ethiopia children are taken out of school and sent to towns to be employed as servants, with their earnings sent back to the family. Similarly, in the lean seasons in Ulipur, Bangladesh children go to other houses or villages to work on farms, tend cattle, or carry out household tasks in exchange for food. The researchers note that the parents are aggrieved by the undue physical labor of their children and worry especially about the vulnerability of girls to beatings and sexual assaults.

Box 3.2. Selling Women in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Trinh has seven daughters. Her husband is dead. A few years ago her eldest daughter, Phuoc, got a job in a restaurant, and from there went on to prostitution to support her mother and sisters. Two years ago, through the services of a broker, Phuoc was married to a Taiwanese man for around $4,500. One year later, another of Trinh’s daughters divorced her husband and married a Taiwanese man. Trinh’s house has now been repaired. It is in good condition and well furnished.
Limited Opportunities

Every day there are more unemployed. Every day one sees, more men around the neighborhood all day long.
—Participant, discussion group of men and women, Moreno, Argentina

There are no opportunities. In the past, there were more.
—Participant, discussion group of men and women, Bedsa, Egypt

The majority in our neighborhood live in poverty. That’s because they don’t have luck and skills. Those who were well off before are well off now too. Those who were poor before are just as poor now.
—A 21-year-old from Varna, Bulgaria

The large majority of men and women in the study view new opportunities as unattainable and economic conditions as worsening. However, in some places that research teams visited, people feel otherwise. News of forward momentum comes mostly from Asia, but sporadic reports from other regions show that some people perceive that they are moving ahead.
In addition, the researchers in every community specifically sought out women and men who had climbed out of poverty and interviewed them. Their stories suggest the sorts of opportunities that can provide pathways out of poverty.

The researchers asked discussion groups to reflect on how their list of pressing problems had changed over the course of the past 10 years or so. In their responses, people especially mention far greater insecurity of livelihood than in the past. Although the impact of declining fish stock is context specific, this explanation of a list of problems and priorities from participants in a Mbwadumu, Malawi discussion group is typical of views elsewhere that earning a living has become increasingly difficult:

We are ranking lack of fish and hunger on position 1 [as the worst problem] because lack of fish is making us suffer from hunger. The lake is our granary. Lack of money is now on position 2, but in the past it was on position 8 because, as we have said, the lake is our granary. In the past we had more fish than now; in that case money was not a problem.

Or this from a group of young men in Kajima, Ethiopia:

Ten years ago we didn’t have unemployment. We were never given land. There were no schools to teach us skills, but there was a literacy program. Today we still can’t find jobs to do or
land to plow. Even those of us who went to schools can’t find jobs. What is the use of going to schools? Most of our problems are the same as 10 years ago.

And in a workshop in Juncal, Ecuador, a discussion group of adult women say “it was better before” because:

There is nowhere to work. We get sick and we don’t have the money to get cured. We don’t have medicines because they are expensive. The government makes everything expensive. There is no land. There is no money. We don’t have livestock to work. We have to get loans. We are poor. We are forsaken. We cry. We only have sorrow. We don’t have money to buy fertilizers, seeds. Everything is in dollars. We don’t have anything to eat.... Everything is so expensive.

The lists of problems had changed greatly over time in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, but here again the central message relates to the hardships of livelihoods. Poor people report that unemployment was not a problem 10 years ago. A group of youths from Sofia, Bulgaria share, “Still, back then there was a safety net associated mainly with the availability of jobs and social security, and even though people were underpaid back then too, they nevertheless had a sense of security.”

Where Life Is Better

Economic conditions are improved if we compare our lives with how they were in the past. But after thinking about it a little more, we find that we are still going down because while we have come up one step the rest of society has gone up 10 steps.

—A poor resident, Ha Tinh, Vietnam

Fifteen years ago, getting cooked lentils, rice, curry, and vegetables was a dream!

—A poor woman, Manjhar, India

Vietnam stands out starkly as a very positive exception among the 23 study countries. Groups at all sites in this country say economic opportunities have increased, and poverty has declined substantially in the last 10 years, thanks to changes in government economic and social policy. The implementation of the Renovation and Open Door policies in the late 1980s led to development of markets, land allocation to households and freedom to travel—changes that people perceived as laying the foundation for increased opportunities. An emphasis on building assets and development of secondary sources of income such as raising livestock, gardening, tree cultivation and
Box 3.3 Case Study: Balancing Multiple Livelihoods and Assets

Amenea from Adahoyi, Ghana is married with three children, ages 7, 11, and 16. Her village sits 8 kilometers from the nearest road, an hour from the nearest telephone. With Amenea’s concentrated effort, her household has managed to join the ranks of those few families in Adahoyi that are better off. Amenea makes and sells malt and rice; she gathers sheanuts to store and sell, and she has her own farm and assists her husband on his farm. She also mentions repaying a loan to purchase peanut seeds and having money left over to reinvest in the businesses. Her entrepreneurship and diverse portfolio of activities and assets is typical of the others in the study who have escaped poverty. During the interview, she proudly told the researcher that all her children are educated.

trading, as well as an extensive network of credit provision, has helped people generate incomes. However, those who still are poor, such as migrants to Ho Chi Minh City, feel left out of the opportunities and discriminated against by official government programs. They feel constrained in particular by lack of credit: “I know how to generate an income but cannot do anything because I have no money.”

In several communities in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka groups speak of greater economic opportunities, but they consider access to such openings as sometimes limited to those who are better off. In some communities in Bangladesh the poor say that opportunities are slightly greater because of the work of NGOs and new opportunities in garment factories. Participants in Dhaka and Chittagong, Bangladesh explain that their main problem is not the lack of jobs but the low wages offered. In almost every community visited for the India study, the poor perceive that interventions by NGOs and the advent of self-help groups and village development committees have improved the social status, livelihood security and availability of livelihood alternatives, but they do not think these gains are shared among some of the poorer groups.³

In some communities that perceive opportunities to be growing, people often associate the advances with the provision of new infrastructure. In Nakorn Patom, Thailand people report that recent investment in “water, electricity, and transportation has vastly improved, making work easier.” Poor people make similar observations on better living and work conditions in some of the favelas (shums or squatted land) of Brazil. The chapter that follows examines the importance of infrastructure in the lives of the poor more closely.

Individual Breakthroughs

In both difficult and supportive contexts, many poor women and men obviously can and do manage to get ahead. To learn more about how poor
Box 3.4 Resilient and Resourceful: Bouncing Back from Devastation in Ghana

Neeena (43) is from Twiabidi, Ghana and has six children. Like many others in the community, she migrated to Twiabidi in 1984 with her husband to do cocoa farming with the hope that they would be able to get out of poverty. A “good Sakarian” gave them land to farm under the condition that their produce would be shared in equal part with him. This they did for two years, and life began to get better just around that time, however, her husband fell ill for almost two months, and she had to sell everything they owned to pay his medical bills. The situation was so difficult that even obtaining food was a problem. They had to depend on the generosity of others.

“Even though life was tough for me, I never gave up hope. I started helping people on their farms in exchange for food. This enabled me to feed my family and even sell some at times. Soon, somebody gave me his cacao farm to look after, and I decided to intercrop the cacao with oil palm trees. This went very well, and when I harvested, I had enough money to start my own farm. With hard work and determination, we have about four different oil palm plantations now. I have been able to put up a house here in Twiabidi and another at Asotwe, in the Ashanti region where I migrated from.”

people pull themselves up and out of the web of poverty, the researchers were asked to identify, interview and write a short life history of a man and a woman in each community “who were poor earlier and are better off now.” The analysis here was informed by a review of factors that people said helped them to escape poverty in a collection of 147 case studies gathered during the fieldwork. The interviews were free flowing.

The mini case studies suggest that many factors contribute to movement out of poverty. As illustrated in figures 3.1 and 3.2, self-employment or entrepreneurship is the most frequent path out of poverty. As illustrated in the story of Neeena from Ghana in box 3.3, men and women also often report multiple sources of income, including from wages and salaries, benefits from family, and income from agriculture and access to land. Approximately one-third of these upwardly mobile manage income flows from all these sources. Many of their stories tell of interruptions and setbacks along the way to a better life (see box 3.4).

Several in this “better off” group mention that they or a spouse managed to save enough from wage labor to then strike out on their own and improve their earnings. Hasina, a 52-year-old married woman with three children in Buq, Somalia, explains that she used her earnings as a midwifery trainer to launch a vegetable business. Today she takes truckloads of potatoes and other vegetables to neighboring areas, and her husband runs a small shop. Saltum from Dahshour Village, Egypt began learning the export business while
Figure 3.2: Factors Leading to Upward Mobility by Region
working as a driver. His first venture with the exporting of watermelons failed, but a few years later he found a new partner and began exporting onions with much greater success.

Men and woman refer frequently to the value of acquiring skills and a willingness to learn on the job. Aldin from Varna, Bulgaria says he earns a good living by working on construction sites, and he learned skills such as plastering and bricklaying while serving in the Army Construction Corps. Kofi from Twabidi, Ghana spent four years in an apprenticeship to become a qualified gin distiller and started his own distillery soon after. Nong from Ha Tinh Province, Vietnam raises chickens, ducks and pigs, and he tells the researchers that “farmers need to know how to choose breeds.” He learned this by reading books and participating in agricultural extension programs.

In fact, a quarter of those interviewed mention skills acquisition, learning to run a business, or acquiring particular skills, while they mention education less frequently but with strong regional differences. The case studies from Latin America and the former Soviet Union speak more about education than those from Africa and Asia.

This group also includes some elderly people who acknowledge receiving critical support from their adult children. Sixty-four-year-old Eliana from Vila Junqueira, Brazil says she moved to her neighborhood long ago to put her children in school. Eliana’s husband is recovering from a stroke, and she explains that they are coping reasonably well because “we have, with the help of our sons, a good medical plan. They help in everything.”

Many in this better off group also speak of weathering setbacks, periods of recovery, and then continuing to move forward. Family illness and death, particularly of the leading breadwinner, commonly disrupted gains, as was the case with Neema in box 3.4. Other interruptions include divorce or desertion, economic and political crises, and natural disasters.

The Challenge of Livelihoods

If you earn a minimal wage or so, and pay 110 reais for rent, what will you live on? You’ll live on odd jobs in order to eat...you can’t study, put your kids in school...underemployment crushes all of this...when you are underemployed, you can’t study, go to the doctor and take care of other basic necessities.

—A discussion group participant, Morro da Conceição, Brazil

Although caught in the struggle to survive, poor people want opportunity, not handouts: “We do not want money; we just want you to employ us. We need factories that would draw all these unemployed people from the streets” (El Gawabter, Egypt). Indeed, people often offer specific
recommendations that would create opportunities for better livelihoods. Here are some:

- "To improve the future living standards of the village," suggest residents of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, "they expect the two lending institutions, the United Currency Society and the Social Development Center...to extend a helping hand by encouraging savings, and giving loans when necessary."
- From Dhibibe Wajru in Ethiopia came the idea that "if the widowed and landless women are given some sort of vocational training, they can make it a means of living."
- In Beni Amer Village, Egypt it is suggested that the government should "build a factory of onion drying or small-scale projects of manufacturing palm wood "grid" or...provide people with money to start an artisan work such as clay manufacturing or local carpet kilim."
- Conditions could improve in Muynak, Uzbekistan if "somebody will redistribute...the rights of accessibility" to the lakes.
- Day care is requested in Novo Horizonte, Brazil: "It is very important, especially for those mothers who have to work."
- "If we had fertilizer some of the problems like medical fees, education fees...could be solved" is a suggestion from Iponenta Chimsele, Zambia.

Achieving a better livelihood emerges as an urgent priority across the study countries. It came from those in villages who depend on farms, pastures, lakes and forests; and from those in cities and the countryside who are forced into temporary and very poorly paid but high-risk, degrading or humiliating work.

The priority and urgency of better livelihoods for poor women and men raise many challenges:

- What kind of actions would make the most direct and meaningful difference in poor people’s lives?
- How might their exposure be reduced to the vagaries of climate? To the exploitation of employers and traders? Or to the unpredictable “taxes” set by those who are wealthier and more powerful?
- How might this policy agenda become much more a focus of local, national and global attention?
Notes

1In small group discussions, participants identify and rank their community's most pressing problems and priorities. Groups then assess whether the problems have changed over the past 10 years and discuss hopes for the future. Participants reflect on which problems the community could solve itself and which require outside support, and in a separate exercise they identify, rank and evaluate the most important institutions in their daily lives and during a crisis. Groups also analyze the causes and impacts of poverty. In addition, individual interviews provide brief life histories of men and women who have escaped poverty as well as of those who have always been poor or have slid into poverty.

2Food and money problems were often at the top of lists as well lack of work, and these were often associated directly with livelihood hardships in the discussions about the lists. Groups focused more on communitywide problems, rather than on personal or household-level concerns. While family problems may be extremely acute for some (e.g., domestic violence), they figure only sporadically in the work of the groups on problems and priorities. This activity was not carried out in Sri Lanka.

3The studies in Bangladesh and India were conducted in areas where NGOs are active. The researchers used these contacts to gain speedy entry into the communities and to facilitate follow-up action.

4The data in figures 3.1 and 3.2 are based on 147 mini-case studies or life histories of people who were identified as moving out of poverty. The sample is not statistically representative, however, and results should be viewed as illustrative. Case studies were selected where upward triggers could be readily identified from the reports on the open-ended interviews. The categories were established through an inductive process of data analyses of the factors underlying upward mobility.
Chapter 4

Places of the Poor

Summary

Many poor people are disadvantaged and endangered by the places and physical conditions where they live and work. They often experience: problems with water that is scarce, inaccessible and unsafe; isolation with bad roads and inadequate transport; precarious shelter; scarcities of energy for cooking and heating; and poor sanitation. Poor communities are typically neglected, lacking the infrastructure and services provided for the better off. Access to services often costs poor people more. Poor people from many communities emphasize how the politics that underpin the provision of infrastructure and public services often reinforce inequities. Those in communities with improved amenities acknowledge the gains to their quality of life.

Many places where poor people live present multiple disadvantages that include not only missing and inadequate infrastructure and services, but also unfavorable geography, vulnerability to environmental shocks and seasonal exposure. Quite often these disadvantages combine in ways that endanger or impoverish those who live there. Poor people’s places in congested urban areas are especially risk-ridden from pollution, sewage and crime. Various steep, low-lying, too close to waterways, or drought-prone, many urban and rural places are vulnerable to the vagaries of weather. Many of the worst deprivations that come with living in these places are seasonal in nature, including property damage by rain, wind, floods and landslides, and unsanitary conditions from flood waters mixed with sewage. Those who live in “places of the poor” are frequently insecure in person and property. Most poor people can find only “places of the poor” in which to live. These places then keep them poor.
Introduction

Every country has a wide range of groups of poor people. The researchers sought out some of the diverse places where they live. In most countries both urban and rural communities were visited.1 Poor people are often born into marginal places and conditions. Then, if they move, they find the better sites already taken. Often the places they do find are bad in many ways, variously isolated, infertile, insecure, vulnerable and dangerous. They include areas that are hilly; remote; drought-prone; exposed to landslides, floods or pollution; distant from or too close to water; and open to extremes of weather.

This chapter explores how these places of the poor impose multiple disadvantages and discomforts on those who live and seek their livelihoods in them. It opens with highlights of poor people’s discussions about the hardships of missing or inadequate infrastructure and basic services. The chapter then examines what emerged in the discussion groups about the politics of infrastructure. A final section highlights how the disadvantages of living in the “places of the poor” interlock to keep people poor or drive them further into poverty.

While the types and combinations of hardships vary widely among places, on balance the urban poor seem to struggle more. Their places are often distinguished by persistent crime and the many forms of pollution that can accompany crowded living without adequate infrastructure and services. A defining hardship of rural places seems to be isolation and lack of communication. But such divides are not clean. Crime and pollution touch many villages, and limited transport and access to information effectively isolate several urban neighborhoods visited for the study.

Infrastructure and services are more readily available in some of the communities, most notably in Brazil, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The people who live in such places widely acknowledge the importance of these improvements to better quality of life.

The Missing Basics

When discussion groups identify and rank their communities’ most pressing problems and priorities, what frequently emerges are serious gaps in access to basic services and infrastructure. Although priorities vary with local contexts, a great many lists indicate difficulties with access to water, roads and transport, housing, fuel and sanitation.

Water—Inadequate and Unsafe

I repeat that we need water as badly as we need air.
—A woman, Tash-Bulak, Kyrgyz Republic

We need boreholes because we rely on unsafe water from streams and unprotected wells. It is a critical problem because
most of these streams and wells dry out during the dry season.
We have to travel long distances searching for water.
—A participant in a discussion group of poor men
and women, Madana village, Malawi

How can we sow anything without water? What will my cow
drink? Drought is so often here. Water is our life.
—A resident of Orgakin, Russia

People in many communities speak forcefully of the lack of adequate and safe
water as an acute deprivation. Water shortages and difficulties accessing safe
drinking water appear most serious and widespread in the African countries.
However, poor women and men from all the regions describe daily struggles
to obtain water for human use. There are problems of distance, quantity, sea-
sonality, quality and safety of supply; environmental issues like flooding, silt-
tation and pollution; questions of maintenance; and often combinations of
these. Water is also critical for animals and crops.

For many, water scarcity means daily hardships. “We have to spend more
than an hour to fetch and bring a pot of water,” say villagers of Dihdihe
Waigu, Ethiopia. In Neterhar, India women trek 2 kilometers to fetch water
and face many risks along the way: “danger of boulders slipping out of the
rock joints...of wild animals, many wolves, and hyenas.” As noted in box
4.1, women find themselves fighting in Ayekale, Nigeria to get at the village’s
only well.

For many rural people, water availability and quality vary with the sea-
sons. As rivers and streams dry out or water sources deteriorate, people suf-
fer shortages. An illustration comes from Malawi. Villagers from Madana
gratefully acknowledge the two new wells in the community, but growing
demand and shortages in the dry season leave people still traveling “long dis-
tances searching for water.” A general observation from Malawi is that water
scarcity is linked to deforestation and the resulting siltation, which, as one of
the researchers observed, “has covered most of the springs.”

Many people in the study share concerns about water quality and pol-
ution, particularly in urban communities. In both El Mathri and Borg Meghezal (which sits just on the outskirts of a city), Egypt discus-
sion groups fear the effects of water pollution and say, “We hope for
our kids not to suffer as we did.” In Etropole, Bulgaria a middle-aged man
exclaims:

Look at our river! The cows stop milking when they drink
this water. When I was a boy we used to go fishing there, and
there were good fish. Now even the frogs have disappeared.
We have no choice but to use it for the gardens—so all the
metals are soaking in the soil and we eat them. They can take
more copper from my lungs and bones than from one meter
of cable.
Box 4.1: A Case Study of Priority Needs in Ayekale Ondo, Nigeria

The village of Ayekale Odoogun lies in Kwara state of southwest Nigeria and is inhabited by 1,200 people across 100 households. About 85 percent are of Islamic faith, and Yoruba is the main ethnic group. It is important to note that Ayekale is better off than many other villages in the study—it has electricity and access to a nearby town and its market, but there is no local health service and the school is 3 kilometers away.

The table below shows how two of the six discussion groups identify and rank the most pressing problems in the community. Lack of drinking water stands out as the most urgent priority. Women and children spend a large part of their day trying to get water from a single hand-dug well, and it is indicated that “women commonly fight over access...” After water, concerns about the long distances to a health center and schools follow. It is interesting to note that with the exception of the female elders group all the discussion groups ranked access to water, health care, and schools above problems related to more material or livelihood needs. This suggests that farming in Ayekale, which has a tarred road and is close to a market, may be more successful than it is the case for many poor rural communities elsewhere in the study.

There are some gender differences in priorities for action that relate to men’s and women’s different livelihoods. About 90 percent of the men farm and some 70 percent of the women engage in informal trading, mainly of processed garri (from cassava). Women single out problems with the distance to the market and equipment for palm oil and cassava processing, as they now have to travel to other villages for processing as well as for trading. Men highlight the lack of industries. Both men and women agree on the need for a local market and better-functioning cooperatives.

### Prioritized List of Problems from Ayekale Odoogun, Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Elders (male)</th>
<th>Elders (female)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of portable water</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of a health center</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of primary school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of industries</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of periodic market</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of oil palm or cassava processing equipment</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor sales</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor performance of cooperative societies</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In speaking about water contamination in Plovdiv, Bulgaria a poor man declares, "I am tired of going to the municipality and insisting that they do something. Of course we are ill." In the urban site of Florencio Varela, Argentina unsafe drinking water is mentioned by a group of young women in these terms: "If two out of three children become ill and begin to vomit...it is due to the water; even though you can add chlorine, you're never sure what you are drinking." Water quality appears in most problem listings for nine communities in Ecuador and is ranked as more pressing in urban than rural sites. Polluted water is also found in rural areas; in Millbank, Jamaica poor people suggest that the use of insecticides and other inputs in banana farming contaminate local water supplies.

For many, water problems arise from inadequate infrastructure and lack of maintenance. People in Urmatal in the Kyrgyz Republic say they rely on a single hydrant and badly need a pipeline. Elsewhere, broken pumps are common: of the six available hand pumps in Dorapalli, India only three are in working condition and just two provide potable water. Even piped water systems, mainly mentioned in Latin America and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, are said to be unreliable, with sometimes broken pipes and often sporadic water delivery. In Nova California, Brazil participants complain that "the piped water comes every 8 days, at times every 15 days...there is a lot of water shortage." In Ulugbek, Uzbekistan discussion groups say that when there is no water pressure in their pipes, people have to go to slippery and polluted drainage ditches, which is a "terrible hardship in the cold of winter."

People attribute the lack of maintenance to various causes. The researchers in Malawi point out that "many water points have been disconnected because the committees misappropriated the fees collected...meant for routine maintenance checks and settlement of bills." In Accompong, Jamaica it is said to be difficult to get the water agency to come and fix broken pipes.

In many rural communities, shortage of water for crops and animals threatens livelihoods and household food security. Lack of irrigation water is identified as a major problem in four out of the six rural sites visited in India. In Eastern Europe and Central and East Asia, poor people mention problems with poorly functioning or damaged irrigation systems repeatedly and farmers express concerns about making the difficult transition of having to pay for irrigation water. And there were communities across Africa and Asia where discussion groups consider new or improved irrigation systems vital to helping them combat drought.

**Isolation and Poor Access**

A community without roads does not have a way out.

—A poor man, Juncaal, Ecuador

If we get the road we would get everything else, community center, employment, post office, water, telephone.

—A young woman, Little Bay, Jamaica
Many of the poor communities in the study are isolated by distance, bad road conditions, lack of or broken bridges, and inadequate transport. In both rural and urban areas, these conditions make it difficult for people to get their goods to market and themselves to places of work, to handle health emergencies, to send children to schools, to obtain public services and to keep in touch with events and influence decisions.

In rural areas people repeatedly mention roads and often bridges when discussing community problems. In isolated tropical communities, an all-weather road passable in the rains tends to be seen as the key to much else. In all but 1 of the 10 communities visited in Malawi, participants identify better roads as an urgent need. In the three rural communities visited in Argentina, people report that there is no transportation into the nearest town and during heavy rains households become cut off by flooding and lack of radios or telephones. People in Chota, Ecuador lack a bridge and have to navigate a river to reach the nearby Pan American highway. A group of poor women mentioned how when the river is low, it takes 10 minutes to cross by boat, "but when the river is high, it's very dangerous and people have died crossing the river."

Difficulty getting crops to market is a recurrent concern. In Twabidi, Ghana truck drivers are said to charge very high fees because of the bad road. As a consequence, much of the food crop is locked up on farms, leading to postharvest losses. The researchers note that the condition of the road is thus a disincentive to production and productivity. Villagers in Millbank, Jamaica talk about the poor condition of the road and distance to a market: "Often times our food rots in the fields, and people are starving here in Jamaica and round the world." A man from Asociación 10 de Agosto in Ecuador complains, "There are no good roads. To get the products out of the farm you have to use horses, but those who don't have a horse cannot do it." In Vietnam, poor villagers indicate that they need to be self-sufficient in food because of costs and the distance of markets, which limits their opportunities to diversify crops.

Travel to clinics or hospitals for treatment, especially in emergencies, is another common concern. A woman from Little Bay, Jamaica might be speaking for many in other countries when she says, "If anybody takes sick in the community it costs a lot to go all the way around; and if you are not careful the people can die before they reach the hospital." Attracting staff to remote villages lacking infrastructure is equally a problem; participants from Okpaje, Nigeria say health personnel avoid their remote village like "a plague because of absence of basic infrastructure."

Across Eastern Europe and Central Asia, participants speak bitterly about how things have become worse, with a largely collapsed transportation system and harsh traveling conditions. A 42-year-old woman in Kalaizh, Bulgaria complains of having to walk 20-plus kilometers a day to work and back: "And after work we have to take care of the animals, cook... By 9 p.m. I can barely stand on my feet." In Sredno Selo, Bulgaria
as well as Kalaidzhi, participants indicate that bus lines have closed down, road conditions have deteriorated and private cars have become too expensive to run and maintain.

Urban isolation of the places of the poor is less obvious but serious. Bad roads, lack of roads and lack of transportation are reported as problems. Researchers, for example, describe the isolation and other infrastructural gaps that exist where a Roma community lives in Dimitrovgrad, Bulgaria. (See box 4.2.) In Malawi the researchers note that the roads into the three urban settlements are full of large potholes and both public and private transport operators have withdrawn service. Women indicate that this has made their lives unbearable because they now either have to walk to work or stay home and earn nothing.

In differing contexts, people illustrate how the lack of roads and other means of communication can limit them, making it more difficult to find jobs, negotiate better prices for their produce, access services such as credit or social assistance, or shape events that affect them. A poor man in Tash Bulak in the Kyrgyz Republic explains that he did not know how to get loans: “There is no telephone communication in the village, no post office. Newspapers and magazines are expensive, and we cannot afford to buy them.” Members of a poor household in a district of Tra Vinh Province Vietnam talk of feeling isolated and helpless without a television or radio. With travel so difficult, participants in many poor places express regrets about their lack of access to elected representatives and other officials.

Box 4.2 A Gypsy (Roma) Ghetto in Bulgaria

Let us take the places the Roma live in, for instance, in Dimitrovgrad. There is a drastic difference in the image of Dimitrovgrad as perceived by official sources and the Roma’s perception of the town. According to the records, Dimitrovgrad has a more or less excellent infrastructure—which, however, does not apply to the poor quarters and, in particular, the Gypsy ghetto. The latter has nothing to do with “official” Dimitrovgrad—there are neither roads nor telephones, the plumbing is disastrous, many houses have no electricity and there’s a bus every three hours. The situation is the same in Sofia—the Roma quarters are entirely different from other Sofia quarters; there is no sewage; the shafts are clogged; drinking water is dirty and stinks; there is no garbage collection or other communal services. The thus-segregated Roma feel truly stigmatized, totally forgotten by one and all, victims of discrimination: “Treated like dogs.”
Bad Housing and Shelter

It's drafty, humid, leaking. Just try living here in winter. Our
children have fallen ill. And the adults too. There are bugs,
cockroaches, what have you. It's cold.

—A group of young Roma men and women,
Krasna Polnia, Bulgaria

A dwelling leaked so much that it woke people up; it was like a
court when the judge is arriving and people say “khoti
lumet”—or “all rise!”

—A woman, Malawi

Poor people almost always have bad housing and shelter. Exceptions can be
found: where there have been sharp economic declines, as in the Eastern
European and Central Asian countries, some who are now very poor still live
in relatively good housing; and sometimes where a series of disasters has hit a
once better-off family, they may still reside in the same relatively good house.

Most, though, live in huts or hovels of temporary and unstable materi-
als, such as adobe (Egypt); “mud, thatch, bamboo” (Ha Tinh, Vietnam);
“reed...ruined zinc” (Barrio Nuevas Brisas del Mar, Ecuador); or mud
walls and roofs thatched with grass (Malawi).

With such precarious shelters, the poor are more exposed to the ele-
ments. In rural Ghana participants explain that those with reed roofs are
more vulnerable to bush fires and storms than those with aluminum.
Similarly, in La Matanza, Argentina a group of middle-aged men describe
how a lodging needs to be secure from the weather; otherwise, “if a storm
comes, the roof flies away and what little there is inside washes away.” In
Malawi, during the previous two years, the collapsing of houses had become
more of a problem because of heavy rains.

Poor people report that fire is frequently a hazard. The danger is acute in
slums built of combustible materials. Dwellings crammed together make
them especially exposed to the spread of fire, like the one that swept part of
a slum in Dhaka. Even with more permanent housing, in Ozerny in Russia,
people point out that electric wiring, having not been updated for 50 years,
is a fire hazard.

For participants, better shelter and housing are sometimes a pressing
priority. The many reasons include physical security and health. In Novo
Horizonte, Brazil, for example, a group of poor women express the desire to
live in barracas, little block houses that would offer greater security from
thieves and from “contact with rats, cockroaches, scorpions...that cause
some deaths."

Energy Scarcity

Finding firewood for cooking is the problem. Very soon we
may have to go to the town to buy firewood.

—A woman, Viyalagoda, Sri Lanka
Gas heating is a great joy for us—it was very difficult to stoke with wood that you first need to gather and fetch from far away.

—A poor elderly man, Takhakupyr, Uzbekistan

The places of the poor typically lack energy sources and supplies. In the warmer countries, people mention energy scarcity and cost mainly in relation to fuel for cooking. In the colder climates, notably the Eastern European and Central Asian countries, it is mainly in relation to heating and electricity.

In the warmer countries, most poor households appear to rely on firewood for cooking. But there is evidence of growing scarcities. In some places, forest areas are disappearing. In the villages of Wewala, Vyralagoda and Ethna in Sri Lanka, for example, women report deforestation as a major problem. Elsewhere firewood is already being purchased. In the rural communities of Kajma, Ethiopia a group of men indicate that women make and sell local drinks to raise money for purchasing household needs such as firewood. With the increased migration of men, women in rural Ecuador complain that they must now collect firewood and tend the farm and they are finding it difficult to feed their children and accomplish other household tasks.

Electricity features less in people's priorities from warmer climates. For some, especially in rural areas, it is not perceived as a realistic issue. A women's discussion group in Twabidi, Ghana explains why they had not identified electricity as a priority. They point out that even the closest large community in the area has no electricity, and even if they had it, they would not be able to pay for it. High charges can be a problem, as in Sri Lanka.

Some discussion groups, mainly in towns and cities, do, however, list electricity as a priority for both their homes and street lighting to reduce neighborhood crime. In Kebale 30, Ethiopia a women's discussion group values receiving electricity to reduce their household work burdens and suggests that “lighting may contribute to decreasing birth rates.” Although not given a high priority, several discussion groups in different parts of the world mention street lighting for socializing at night and as a deterrent to crime. As a middle-aged woman from Razgrad, Bulgaria explains:

*There is no street lighting since 1991. Eight years they did not put a lamp. There should be one at least on the crossroads. The people have to walk with electric torches and sticks for the dogs. And the lonely women! They close their doors at 6 p.m.*

Energy scarcity emerges as especially acute for poor people in the urban areas of the cold-weather climates of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The cost of heating fuel is a frequent problem. In Orgakin, Russia all the discussion groups mention struggling with gas shortages over the previous winters: “We have to pay for it—or else the gas supply will be cut off. We won’t survive.” In rural areas of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, as in the other regions of the study, people report gathering firewood from nearby forests for use in their homes and for selling.
Box 4.3 Old, Cold and Alone

The problem of fuel shortages in Eastern European and Central Asian countries is severe for the elderly. Many poor elderly participants identify winter as a painful time because they are alone without wood for heating and they have no children nearby to help out. In Europe, Bulgaria the researchers were told, "There are grandmothers staying alone all the day, trembling under their blankets all the winter. They do not go outside because they are cold; they do not even walk in the room." Similarly, a man in Razgrad, Bulgaria explains, "They tell me that they try to drink almost no water; because it is too cold to go to the loo and come back to the bed. Do you imagine how they live? They are too old to read, because of the eyewight: they conserve on electricity, so they do not watch TV, they do not go outside to see somebody else—they disappear in November, and we see them again in April."

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the cold of winter and the lack of warm clothing and heating touches many aspects of life. A young woman from Dimitrovgrad, Bulgaria explains:

Winters are worst. Summers we can work in the field. Winters are also worse because there's nothing to keep us warm. There aren't any allowances from Town Hall...no firewood. Clothes and shoes are a problem in winter, and so is school for the kids. There's no money for snacks and textbooks.

Elsewhere in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, people talk of cold classrooms and the inability of schools to afford fuel. Cold and lack of clothing are a problem: students often wear coats in the classrooms and many children rotate attending school, sharing shoes and coats with their siblings. "My neighbors' children have one pair of shoes and take turns wearing them. It's a good thing they go to school in two different shifts," reports a participant from Bashk in the Kyrgyz Republic. A woman in Brumac, Bosnia and Herzegovina with a child in primary school reports that parents must supply funds for heating wood or their children will not receive their completion certificates. The woman is upset that "the people who run the school do not ask themselves whether the parents can afford all of this." Box 4.3 illustrates the suffering endured by the elderly as they struggle through winters. As in so many domains, so with energy scarcity: the poor and vulnerable suffer, and finally the children.

No Sanitation—Filth and Stench

Where I live has two toilets in it, and they broke. I have to eat and sleep on it [the sewage], and it is a mess.

—A poor woman, Cassava Piece, Jamaica
Dirty roads that are full of rubbish.
—A pressing problem listed by a discussion group,
El Mataría, Egypt

Sanitation problems are acute in many communities, especially urban ones. In Bangladesh, however, poor people note a scarcity of latrines in rural as well as in urban areas. They also mention difficulties with paying for building materials and, in urban settlements, with finding space. In the settlement of Kebele 30 in Ethiopia people say that most households have no latrines and public ones are not available. Sewage there "runs openly on the roads," endangering children playing in the streets. Pressing concerns about health risks, particularly to children, and smells of open sewage canals are particularly striking in the reports from the Latin American settlements.

Rain adds to the dangers of lack of sanitation. In Nova Califórnia, Brazil a discussion group participant complains that "the sewage runs in your front door, and when it rains, the water floods into the house and you need to lift the things...." At Barrio Las Pascuas in Bolivia a woman says, "Just look how the kids are playing in the street with so much dirt. The water in the streets brings infections, and it is because of a lack of a sewage system...."

The hazards of garbage-filled alleys and unreliable waste collection are mentioned most frequently in urban places in Latin America. At Isla Trinitaria in Ecuador a group of adult women describe how the houses are made of cane and stand on top of the water at the pier or embankment at the far end, where there is garbage contamination, "a plague of flies" and "illnesses are caused by pollution." In the settlements of Sacadura Cabral, Moçro da Conceição, Borborema and Nova Califórnia in Brazil the residents complain of foul-smelling garbage building up at the doors of their homes and "causing all types of diseases affecting all the community and especially children." In a discussion group of women in Nova Califórnia, they say, "Waste brings some bugs. Here we have rats, cockroaches, spiders and even snakes and scorpions." On their list of pressing community problems, a women's group in Sacadura Cabral emphasize "rats and cockroaches" along with "sewage on the streets."

The Politics of Infrastructure and Place

Last summer before the election of the mayor...a first-class road was built here. But after the election, the researchers were told, all the work stopped.
—Researcher team, Dzerzhinsk, Russia

Discussion groups in widely differing contexts emphasize the disparities that exist between areas that are poor and those that are better off. Poor people not only note that their communities are worse off, but that the politics surrounding the provision of infrastructure and public services
frequently reinforce these inequities. They often express a sense of having been abandoned or forsaken by their governments.

Discussion group participants often point out how their wealthier neighbors enjoy better access than they do to services such as water, electricity, latrines, sewerage, transport and telephones. Typical of this is the observation in villages in Bihar, India that the approach roads go to the upper-caste localities and then end. Likewise, in Getengsari, Indonesia the researchers write that the “road stopped near the better-off homes, leaving the part going to poorer homes uncompacted.” And in Galih Pekuwon, also in Indonesia, public toilets and washing-bathing facilities are built close to better-off households, although many of them already have their own toilets. In Oq Olyn, Uzbekistan participants indicate that while they have no water in their pipes, the neighborhood across the road with the “employees of district organizations” has water.

Though many places of the poor are the most environmentally threatened and in need of infrastructure, they are the least likely to get it. “The conditions of life get better as you get farther from the river bank,” and the rich with cars live the farthest away, noted a researcher in La Matanza, Argentina. Also, distance and isolation can mean that others do not perceive the lack of amenities, as in the case of the Gypsy ghetto in Dimitrovgrad in Bulgaria (see box 4.2).

To make things worse, people in poor areas sometimes have to pay more for what they do get or have to provide services for themselves, as shown in box 4.4 on one part of Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam.

A number of study participants blame politicians and governments for arbitrary decisions and actions. In Isla Trinitaria, Ecuador a discussion group of men declare that “water is a political tool. The tubing is already installed and the work is done. The politician who wants support will give the drinking water.” In the Asociación 10 de Agosto neighborhood, also in Ecuador, a woman observes, “The works for drinking water have stopped. Now they say we have to do the paperwork all over again. Nobody gives us anything. They say there are no funds.” In Florencio Varela, Argentina a woman shares her frustration with not being able to get additional water taps installed: “For two years we knocked on all of the doors...we went to the municipality and here we are with the plans for water taps...and without the water.” Were it not for corruption and inefficiency, a man from Entra a Pulso, Brazil stresses that the water shortages in his community would not occur: “The money is stolen and consequently there are no investments. There is a lot of water in this country’s underground. I say this because I have worked for 30 years digging wells in this country.”

Where basic infrastructure and services have been provided, participants express deep appreciation for the difference these have made in the quality of their lives. This is marked in some of the communities in Brazil, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

With water, electricity, telephones and garbage collection services now available in his favela a man in Nova Califórnia, Brazil gratefully
Box 4.4 Who Gets Less Pays More: The Skewed Provision and Cost of Public Services in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

In Ho Chi Minh City, those who live in the places of the poor suffer three kinds of discrimination: less infrastructure and services; higher costs; and having to provide roads and drains themselves.

First, "...certain semi-urban areas, such as district 8, appear to be left behind in terms of infrastructure and services (schools, hospitals, recreation centers, even traffic lights)."

Second, poor families farther from supplies have to pay more. "Water and electricity connection charges depend on how far houses are from the main lines, which are situated on these thoroughfares. As a result, most poor families, who live in small alleys far from the street, have to pay more." Poor migrant families are similarly disadvantaged, having to buy these services from other (better-off) people in their neighborhoods at inflated rates.

Third, poor people have to provide their own infrastructure: "The policy regarding the building and maintenance of roads and drains is...that all such infrastructural work on main thoroughfares is paid for by the state, whereas similar work has to be done in neighborhoods that are situated along small alleys, it is the local people who have to pay."

acknowledges that "10 years ago...life was much, much worse.... Today, in comparison with the past, we live 'in heaven.'" EMASA, the local water agency for Novo Horizonte, Brazil, is well regarded by the residents there despite problems with erratic supplies. The researchers mention that EMASA staff have helped the community by "giving containers to people to collect water...it means that they are helping those who cannot pay for the service."

The community of Accompong, Jamaica recently acquired electricity from the Jamaica Public Service Company and "some returning residents regard this as the greatest achievement of the community as it has made it possible for them to decide to return home and live in the community." Discussion groups in Pegambiran, Indonesia note that several important improvements have been made in recent years to their community: clean water service has been provided since 1990, several latrines have been built and garbage collection has increased to once a week. In Baan Pak Wan, Thailand the NGO Population and Community Development Association is credited with helping the community to build a water system by lending money and providing technicians for building water tanks and household water jars.

These are exceptions, though. Most study participants convey that their needs for basic infrastructure are as urgent as ever and much too little has been done. In some cases, they link growing pressures for basic services to
rising populations in their communities. They also repeatedly express the sense that adequate services should have been provided to them and that their governments have let them down.

Trapped in Poor Places

Many participants from diverse communities provide illustrations of how their safety is endangered and their lives greatly limited because of the difficult and risky conditions where they live. Very frequently these disadvantages can be found in combinations; and sometimes they interlock in ways that present serious hazards to local people. Missing infrastructure makes many communities in the study more vulnerable to environmental shocks and seasonal weather hazards. Unfavorable geography adds to the risks. Further insecurities, particularly for the urban poor, relate to heightened levels of crime, uncertainties over property tenure and a stigma attached to their slum. Poor children in many communities face a multitude of risks to their safety.

Environmental Risks

The water in the estuary is completely contaminated with solid waste (trash, dead decomposing animals, etc.) and liquid waste (sewage) and toxic waste from the industries in the port of Guayaquil.

—A researcher reporting on problems common to all groups in Isla Trinitaria, Ecuador

Unfortunately for me, the land on which I made my farm was a swampy area and when it rained the whole farm submerged with water. That also destroyed my farm.

—An elderly man, Atonsu Bekro, Ghana

The study illustrates repeatedly how many poor villages and urban settlements are sited in environmentally vulnerable places, largely because the better places have long been taken over. Many of the communities the researchers visited sit on flood plains and in swamps, beside and over waterways, next to industrial sites, along steep hillsides and in drought-prone areas sometimes quite distant from water sources.

Among rural areas, Bangladesh and Ethiopia stand out. For Bangladesh major dangers include flooding, erosion of riverbanks and rivers changing course. Those who settled the Khaliyari site had been displaced earlier by a river, but Khaliyari itself, where they resettled, is similarly vulnerable, perhaps relatively unoccupied for precisely that reason. During the 1998 floods, half the village at the Khaliyari site was swept away. In rural Ethiopia, people say it is lack of rains and drought that combine with the increasing fragmentation of landholdings to create devastating and recurring famines.

villager from rocky and mountainous Mitti Kolo, Ethiopia says the "hope" for crops "is squeezed to emptiness" by drought.

Urban environments are described as, if anything, more vulnerable and dangerous than rural ones. Combinations of high population density, missing or inadequate infrastructure and physical vulnerability make these places susceptible to multiple and sometimes quite severe environmental threats. The barrio of Isla Piedad in Ecuador illustrates the point. It is on top of a sand landfill that joins a river, with many houses hanging suspended over canals. When the tide rises some 2 meters or more, many of the houses get flooded. A canal of sewage runs through the barrio, causing a "nauseating stench." During El Niño in 1997-98, the barrio suffered serious floods and whatever infrastructure existed was destroyed. During the same period, an oil spill from the Trans-Ecuadorean oil pipeline, which runs from the Amazon to the Esmeraldas refinery, resulted in a fiery, exploding river, affecting all those who lived along the banks.

Those lodged next to industrial sites face particular hazards to health and livelihood. The town of El Mataria in Egypt is located alongside a lake where many poor people's livelihoods are tied to fishing. The continued pollution of the lake from city waste threatens both the health and incomes of the poor. This has become worse as the lake has been dried out to increase building space. In Dzerzhinsk in Russia people say the strong summertime winds blow hazardous dust from nearby chemical plants across their town. Rates of cancer and other illnesses are especially high among the workers at the plants. The shifts at the plants are only four hours long and workers usually retire by 45. Voluntad de Dios, Ecuador, a community of mostly indigenous people, is surrounded by two oil-drilling refineries. Oil has seeped into the soil and water. One of the participants from the community comments, "Everything is contaminated: land, water, plants, and people."

Seasonal Stress: Worst at Bad Times

Participants frequently mention the seasonality of poverty and ill being. The problems they face often reflect the time of year. While the bad times differ in warmer and colder climates, adverse factors tend to coincide and reinforce each other. Everywhere, bad places are worst during the bad times. Deprivations include greatly reduced work opportunities, damage to shelter by rain and wind, unsanitary conditions from flooding and sewage, ill health, physical isolation and environmental vulnerability. These last two deserve elaboration.

Seasonal weather often compounds difficulties of transport and travel. During the rainy seasons in Bangladesh, India and Indonesia, people repeatedly mention how flooded and rain-damaged roads make it impossible to seek work or get to hospitals for care. Poor people from Twabidi, Ghana identify as their second most pressing problem, after a health clinic, a better road linking Twabidi to Tepa. The current road is impassable during the rainy season.
Seasonal access to school is a recurring physical difficulty taking different forms. Padamukti in Indonesia and Khaliayuri in Bangladesh are among the sites where seasonal floods make it difficult to get children to school. At Urmal in the Kyrgyz Republic, residents say that especially in winter it is difficult for children going to school, since there is no bus service between villages.

Environmental vulnerability is also markedly seasonal. Its most stark form is perhaps the havoc wreaked by seasonal floods. In Khwalala, Malawi participants report that serious problems arise if all of the boreholes break down during the rainy season; it is often risky to take water from the lake because it is filled with wastes from the highlands. In Indonesia several of the urban sites are located in low-lying areas with poor drainage that are prone to frequent floods. The river that runs along Pegambiran, for instance, brings in silt and garbage from the city and overflows during heavy rains. In Padamukti people consider floods the most pressing problem because they cause skin and eye diseases, harvest failures and damage to homes. In Tanjungrejo the rainwater seeps into the homes and sits in “stinking puddles.”

Seasonal floods, landslides and mudslides are feared “calamities” for people in the hilly villages of Bashi and Achy in the Kyrgyz Republic. Residents of Bashi say that in the Soviet times there was some government help to rebuild homes destroyed by mudslides but now such funds are not available. The landslides in Achy have driven some people to move into the valley, where unemployment and the cost of living are reported to be higher.

In varied ways adverse seasonality interacts with disadvantages of place. And many of the sorts of infrastructure and services that would improve the places of the poor and make them more livable would also reduce those seasonal hardships.

Insecurity and Stigma

After 11, when it’s dark, it’s better not to go out, especially in winter. A neighbor of mine went to the liquor store, and when he was coming back, he was stripped of everything in the doorway of the entrance, the money, the bottle, everything.

—A resident of Ekaterinburg, Russia

Rural places of the poor vary in security. In urban places of the poor high levels of crime and violence cause more consistent and often severe insecurity of both person and property, as chapter 8 reports. Poor people also report being shunned by would-be employers because of where they live.

Legal insecurity is also widespread. Again and again, poor people are residing and working on land to which they have no rights or rights that are uncertain and insecure. In rural areas this can be the land of a big landlord. In rural Ethiopia insecurity of land tenure is national in scale. In urban areas, such as Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City, this can be land scheduled for clearance
or land that has been appropriated by a boss or landlord, or public land. Shelter and housing are often also legally insecure.

People in Isla Trinitaria, Ecuador spoke of the constant threat of being thrown out after they had “invaded” an area and grabbed land. After filling in the land in the area, the municipality carried out a census, and a participant confided that “in that moment we didn’t sleep for fear that [we might] be evicted or the neighborhood burned down, but they didn’t throw us out, thanks to God. After, the census came and then we knew the solares [small plots of land] were ours.” In the early period of the land invasion, the squatters had to stand guard all the time, because if they did not their plot would be sold to someone else by a land trafficker. Sometimes the same piece of land was sold over and over again.

In Latin America and the Caribbean generally and perhaps more widely, those who live in the places of the poor suffer area or ghetto stigma. In Brazil and Jamaica residents find it difficult to get jobs if would-be employers know they come from places with bad reputations: “You can’t give a downtown address if you want to get and keep a job,” says a poor person in Bower Bank, Jamaica.

**Catastrophic for Children**

_The children keep playing in the sewage._

—A woman, Sabadura Cabral, Brazil

Many places of the poor are especially dangerous to the health of children. In some communities they play amid the filth, rubbish and open waters, and among gangs and drug dealers. Bad infrastructure also brings dangers. A person in Vila Junqueira, Brazil says about an electricity connection,

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**Box 4.5 Five Small Children Drowned or Dead in Mud: Bataala, Bangladesh**

In part of Bataala slum, Dhaka City, Bangladesh shanties of bamboo have been constructed in raised platforms over a big ditch, which is used for all sorts of waste. Below the shanties is thick and greasy mud or water covered in water hyacinth. Rani worked as a maid servant in two houses. Her husband left her and married again. She lives in a bamboo shanty with her two children, since she earns very little. She has no alternative but to leave her children in that house. One day when she went to work, her two-year-old daughter dropped into the ditch and could not get out.

In the last two years five children have been lost in Bataala this way. If a baby drops in, he or she drops with force and sinks deep into the grease and mud and goes into water under water hyacinths. Any rescue operation under the raised platforms is difficult. So there is no hope of getting back alive the babies that fall in.
"The cable goes through my kitchen and if a child touches it he will die...there are five to six families using the same connection." Parents—especially single parents—who must leave children to go for work are particularly worried. Leaving a child home risks injury, abduction or death (see box 4.5). Not going to work can mean penury and starvation.

The Challenge of Poor Places

Many places of the poor snare poor people in a web of disadvantages, including isolation, problems of water and energy, sewage, garbage, pollution, filth, environmental hazards, ill health, seasonal exposure to the worst conditions, insecurity of person and property, and stigma of place. These disadvantages are not universal, but many apply in many places much of the time. And they interlock as a trap.

In the struggle for livelihood and a better life, the places of the poor deepen deprivation. Poor places make it difficult for poor people to escape. Poor places keep people poor. And poor places also kill.

Notes

1 This chapter draws on small group discussions of wellbeing and illbeing and the characteristics and proportion of different social groups in the community. Discussion groups also identify and rank their community's most pressing problems and priorities, assess whether the problems have changed over the past 10 years and discuss hopes for the future. Participants reflect on which problems the community could solve itself and which require outside support, and in a separate exercise they identify and evaluate the most important institutions in their daily lives and during a crisis.

2 In weighing evidence, the seasonality of the fieldwork needs to be borne in mind. Researchers visited communities for this study mainly in February, March and April of 1999. On the one hand, in the countries in warmer climates north of the equator, these are generally better times of the year: in rural areas following harvest, when poor people tend to be relatively healthy and less poor. On the other hand, these months have a lot of rain for warmer countries south of the Equator, and further north, it is still winter.
Chapter 5

The Body

Summary

Poor people repeatedly cite bodily ill-being as a part of the bad life. They often speak of being hungry, weak, sick, exhausted, in pain or mentally distressed. Recurring themes involve the body: importance of appearance; how a strong and healthy body is needed to work and earn a livelihood; how those who are hungry and weak cannot work well and consequently are paid less and less reliably; and how, in sum, health and strength matter most to those who have them least and who are most likely to lose them.

Participants identify ill health as both a cause and a consequence of poverty. Discussion groups in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean list poor physical health more frequently than any other single condition as an impact of poverty. Especially in Malawi and Zambia, HIV/AIDS is seen as an acute problem. In discussing the cause and impacts of poverty, participants also point to the close relationship between poor mental and physical health and other aspects of the bad life, such as food insecurity. In case studies analyzed, multiple factors—loss of income coupled with cost of treatment and the transformation of wage-earner into a dependent—make injury and illness common triggers of impoverishment.

In most countries, and especially in Africa and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, participants think health services have become more expensive and difficult to obtain. Combinations of factors deter and exclude poor people from receiving medical care: physical inaccessibility and the high cost of transportation; lack of medicines; legal and extralegal charges for treatment and medicines; time taken traveling and waiting; poor treatment; callous, rude, discriminatory and humiliating behavior by health staff; and their own, often deepening poverty and inability to pay.

On the positive side participants appreciate public food and income support, such as ration books and the public distribution system in India, samrhibi (a subsidy program) in Sri Lanka and free meals in Argentina. Poor people, especially in Brazil, praise committed and compassionate health workers. Even when traditional and private practitioners are more expensive, poor people often prefer them because they are more accessible, treat people more quickly, and allow payment by installments or in kind. Sri Lanka stands out as a country with a largely free, uncumbersome, and considerate medical service, contrasting with countries and conditions where poor people who are sick and injured cannot afford treatment and "just sleep and groan."
Introduction

For me, a good life is to be healthy.
—An old man, Dibdihe Wajru Peasant Association,
Ethiopia

Let hunger be ranked first because if you are hungry you cannot work! No, health is number one because if you are ill you cannot work.
—Discussion group of women and men,
Musanya Village, Zambia

To be well and strong in the body and without hunger, discomfort or worry feature repeatedly in participants’ descriptions of the good life. In describing illbeing, in contrast, they reveal how often and deeply they suffer pain and distress from being hungry, weak, exhausted and sick.

In discussion groups, physical health is by quite a margin the most frequently identified impact of poverty, exceeding even food. In Africa physical health holds a striking lead over other effects of poverty, with crime in second place. Indeed, groups in Africa mention ill health more frequently as a consequence of poverty than any other factor in any region. In Latin America and the Caribbean it comes in first, with food second. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia it places second after crime. In Asia, it is one of many impacts of poverty.

The chapter opens with findings about the hardships of poor appearance, hunger, exhaustion and illness. It then explores how poor people’s bodies are crucial but vulnerable assets, and the deeply impoverishing effects of illness and injury. The next section highlights the series of obstacles faced by poor people when seeking medical care, including corruption in fees, preferential treatment for those with influence and money, difficulties getting to clinics and hospitals, shortages of medicines, being asked to wait a long time for service, and being treated with rudeness and indifference by medical staff. The chapter closes with some examples of positive experiences with public health care and social assistance programs, and with traditional and private sources of treatment.

How the Body Looks and Feels

Again and again, people describe the very poor as those with poor appearances, and those who cannot feed themselves adequately or afford treatment when sick. More than appearances, participants stress the physical and mental experience of hunger, weakness, exhaustion and sickness. Among these, hunger and sickness stand out most.
Physical Appearance

One part of physical wellbeing is to appear well and strong. Appearances matter especially for girls and young women. Female adolescents in Gowainghat, Bangladesh probably speak for many girls and young women in South Asia when they describe good quality of life as being able to eat to their heart's content and having a father who will provide them with clothes, oil for their hair and soap. In Malawi the poorest are known as "the stunted poor." In Ethiopia people say, "We are skinny" and "We are deprived and pale."

Hunger

They [the children] sometimes just get sick for no reason.
Sometimes it's because of lack of food. We are poor. We have no money to buy or to feed ourselves. Now, everything is so expensive that we can only buy pasta, salt, and oil. Some days we have nothing to eat but chichita [a drink] because there is no money.

—A woman, Voluntad de Dios, Ecuador

Not surprisingly, participants often call food their highest priority. In wellbeing rankings, especially in rural areas, wellbeing groups are distinguished by the number of months of food security in a year and the number of meals a household usually has in a day. In numerous areas in different countries wellbeing is linked with being able to have three meals a day.

Pressing problems of hunger appear most frequently in the reports from Africa. Food insecurity is a pervasive preoccupation in the rural and some urban areas in Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria and Zambia, and especially for refugees in Somaliland. Across all groups in Zambia, access to food is perceived as the main determining characteristic of wellbeing and wealth. It is perhaps indicative that a group of youth in Zambia analyzing causes and impacts of poverty make it "poverty/hunger." Especially in Africa the poorer groups in communities often report that they can have only one meal a day, usually lunch, and that they are hungry at night. Some occasionally go without food for days.

Though most widespread in African communities, such deprivation is also found elsewhere (see box 5.1). Poor people in Bangladesh, Ecuador, India and Indonesia frequently mention hunger to the researchers. Food insecurity and hunger is the second most frequently mentioned impact of poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean. Despite Sri Lanka's relatively effective support for poor people, they report hunger there too.

Researchers uncovered surprising degrees of food shortage and even quiet individual starvation in the Eastern European and Central Asian countries. In one community in rural Kyrgyz Republic six out of eight groups
Box 5.1 Hunger Even in Sri Lanka

Many poor families have to be satisfied with one full meal a day. A housewife from a poor family in Ethera/Gangegoda, Sri Lanka relates how they manage to spend the day forgoing meals. Her husband who goes out to work as a wood cutter has to be satisfied with a cup of tea for lunch while the children who attend after-school classes have only a light meal for lunch. The dinner is the only meal prepared for the day. It consists of rice and one curry.

discussing changes in wellbeing identify “malnutrition and hunger” as replacing “enough for everyone” and “a nutritious diet.” In Dimitrovgrad, Bulgaria a group of men and women comment, “We're so hungry that we can barely stand on our feet.”

Poor people have diverse responses to food shortages and hunger. The hungry sometimes resort to theft. Those who steal tend to explain their actions as necessary to feed their children. People also turn to God. In Dobra Yirkpog, Ghana a men's discussion group says that, to cope with declines in wellbeing and periods of hunger, they “pray to God for help and for peace of mind.”

Exhaustion: Poverty of Energy and Time

A normal person has to have some self-esteem, to take a holiday, read a book. While now—you work here or there all day in order to have something to eat, and at night you can’t even exchange a couple of words like normal persons, you drop off asleep as if you were dead. It’s as if you were dead while you were still alive.

—A middle-aged woman, Bulgaria

Again and again, participants speak of the stress of hard work when underfed. Older men in rural Bangladesh say that they have to work very hard on very little food. Participants in a discussion group from Pajón, Ecuador report, “People look desperate. There is nothing to eat...there are people in the fields who only drink a little water with herbs in it and a roasted banana, that’s why they are malnourished, but imagine if we didn’t get a harvest, they couldn’t even eat the banana.”

“Time poverty” compounds these difficulties for many, especially women. As the burden of work to earn incomes shifts to more and more poor women, they have more and more to do. Many women lack time for anything but work and tending others. A Vietnam report says of a 29-year-old woman supporting a chronically sick husband, a mother-in-law aged 70, and
five children, "[Her] life is about managing time." The increasing burdens of women's expanded roles mean they have little or no time to rest, reflect, enjoy social life, or take part in community or religious activities.

In poor people's analyses of the causes of poverty, laziness and apathy are quite commonly cited. This seems to conflict with the perception that many poor people are hardworking and resilient. The apparent contradiction, however, might be resolved this way: workers short of food become exhausted. "Apathy" and "laziness" minimize effort. Such attitudes and behavior can be seen as a strategy for conserving energy. A man in Kajima, Ethiopia says: "We eat when we have. We sleep when we don't." "Laziness," apathy and sleep save energy and food.

Some poor people, some or much of the time, are underoccupied. But many are stressed by too much to do. Many activities are harder and take longer for poorer people than for the less poor. Fetching and queuing for water is an example, demanding both time and energy. Going to the toilet can be time-consuming. In Chittagong, Bangladesh a serious shortage of toilets means that every day a long queue forms outside them. Accessing governmental and other services also often takes much time and physical energy, with many communities distant, isolated and with inadequate roads and transportation. In addition to the service fees, the time and travel costs of getting medical attention deter many.

Sickness of Body and Mind

During the study, poor people mentioned quite a broad range of injuries and illnesses: broken limbs, burns, poisoning from chemicals and pollution, diabetes, pneumonia, bronchitis, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, asthma, diarrhoea, typhoid, malaria, parasites from contaminated water, skin infections and other debilitating diseases. Mental health problems are often raised jointly with concerns about sickness and injury. Poor people also frequently discuss hardships associated with drug and alcohol abuse.

Mental health problems—stress, anxiety, depression, lack of self-care and suicide—are among the more commonly identified effects of poverty and illbeing by discussion groups. They are most frequently mentioned in Latin America and the Caribbean and least frequently in Asia. A middle-aged participant in Bijeljina, Bosnia and Herzegovina notes connections: "The rise in the number of people with heart complaints, high blood pressure, depression has become normal for us. There is not a person in Tobjak that does not suffer from at least one of these. All of this has been brought on by poverty and war." In some African communities, people often describe a mental condition associated with poverty as "madness." The researchers' report from Barrio Sol y Verde, an urban site in Argentina, describes depression and a sense of impotence. Death is very present in different ways: sickness, accidents, physical aggression related to crime, or family mishap and suicide. A common theme is the stress of not being able to provide for one's family. In the words of an older woman in Isla
Trinitaria, Ecuador with 18 children: “I want to commit suicide, I want to run out...because to see the kids crying and I do not have one sucé to give them some bread...life is so sad.”

People associate all forms of sickness and abuse with stress, anguish and illbeing, but participants pick out three for special mention: HIV/AIDS, alcoholism and drugs.

Those who took part in the discussions in Argentina, Ghana, Jamaica, Thailand, Vietnam, and several other countries mention HIV/AIDS as a problem. Its impact is by far the most marked in Malawi and Zambia, where poor people frequently raise and discuss the subject. In Zambia a group of youth made a causal diagram that links poverty to prostitution to AIDS and finally to death. Many people there are dying of AIDS and related diseases, which affect livelihoods and strain the extended family.

Poor people foresee a bleak future. The problem of orphans is serious and becoming worse. In Mwadzulu, Malawi a group of village women say, “These children lack many things in their lives, and we cannot manage to provide them with everything.” Discussion groups in another village predict that AIDS will force a lot more people into poverty in the near future: “We do not think that life will become any better for our children and even for generations to come.”

Groups in many places mention a syndrome of poverty—money spent on alcohol or other drugs, male drunkenness and domestic violence. In Latin America and the Caribbean, ill health is the most frequently mentioned impact of poverty. People link it with disease, alcoholism and drug abuse. Poor people regard drug use and alcoholism as causes of violence, insecurity and thefts.

Alcoholism is especially prevalent among men. In both urban and rural Africa poor people mention it more frequently than drugs. A cause-and-

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**Box 5.2 Drug Abuse and Misery**

*When I give money for bread, my heart aches, but when it is for—heroin—I feel so nice, my soul feels so pleasant, I feel great. But then I wake up in poverty, and it is horrible.*

—Kamen, a 30-year-old heroin user, Bulgaria

*This heroin has ruined my life. Look at my arms (shows his arms, all in marks from inoculations). And it hurts a lot. I have very bad pains; I am dying. Can you arrange for me to get into a hospital?*

—Albin, an 18-year-old heroin user, Bulgaria

*Now there are nine-year-olds taking drugs. Their parents see them so drugged up that they cannot do anything, so they just protect the other children.*

—A woman, La Matanza, Argentina
impact diagram, resulting from several group discussions in Kuphera, Malawi, shows that beer-drinking leads to promiscuity and diseases and then to death. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia poor people see alcoholism as a significant consequence of poverty and as linked with other aspects of the bad life. In Ak Kiya village in the Kyrgyz Republic a woman says, “There are a lot of people in this village who drink vodka in the morning, and then go and do something bad, commit crime.” Many discussion groups from all regions in the study report problems of physical abuse of women when husbands come home drunk.

Drug abuse is mentioned frequently, especially in urban areas, including urban Latin America, Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City. It also comes up in parts of Bulgaria, Kyrgyz Republic, Russia and Uzbekistan. Those addicted are miserable, as are those who are worried about their addicted children (see box 5.2).

The Body as an Asset

_We have nothing but our hands._
—A resident, Ha Tinh, Vietnam

_I have been overstrained with the number of deliveries I have made, which has made me too weak to work._
—A mother of seven, Dorapalli, Andhra Pradesh, India

For many poor people, the body is their main asset. For some, it is the only asset they have. The poorer people are, and the less educated or skilled, the more their livelihood is likely to involve physical work, whether in farming or other physical urban or rural activities. Shortage of food and sickness then not only cause pain and anguish but also weaken and devalue the asset and reduce returns to work. Risk and vulnerability are high: the body is both indivisible and uninsured. Where accident or sickness makes work by a breadwinner impossible, food and income supplies cease. And paying for treatment further impoverishes a family. At a stroke, the body can flip from being the main asset to being a costly liability. As the researchers from Bedda, Egypt write, “The poor always say that their strength or health is their main capital.”

Poor people are therefore vulnerable to situations in which they overexert or maltreat their bodies, as they may do to gain a livelihood. Excessively hard or unhealthy work can lead to sickness. The Malawi National Report observes that “some people from households that are desperate resort to casual labor that they said is hazardous to their health because they said in most cases, they tend to overwork themselves with the aim of making more money. Their wages are miserable.” A man in Olmalyq, Uzbekistan, whose work in bad conditions in a zinc factory made him ill, lost his job. As economic conditions deteriorate, people can work harder with greater ill effects: in Thailand all the groups at Kaoseng spoke of the problems of unemployment,
debts and the rising costs of living. The research team reports, “They unanimously agreed to work harder, regardless of the workload and time. Some worked until they were sick.”

For poor women, girls, and some boys, their bodies are potentially income-earning assets in sex work. In the words of a group of women in Malawi, “There is no reason for them to suffer when they have money in their bodies...” But this has its well-known hazards. In Malawi researchers report, “Many women have over the years become prostitutes, and this has led to family breakdowns...some have contracted HIV/AIDS.”

The hungry and weak are also vulnerable in another way: they are liable to be paid less. Occasionally this is charitable: some people may be employed at a minimal rate to give them some income, food and self-respect, like an old widow in Ghana (see box 5.3). More often, employers are exploiting the workers. In a fishing community in Malawi participants complain that employers usually take advantage of people’s desperate situations to make them work more for low wages. A group of men say,

...we get some K 5.00, buy some maize for one day’s consumption; when it is finished we go again,... The problem is that these boat owners know that we are starving. As such we would accept any little wages they would offer to us because they know we are very desperate...we want to save our children from dying....

Food and health are thus fundamental not just to physical and mental wellbeing but also to sustain adequate livelihoods. Whether vicious or benign, the causality is circular (see figure 5.1).

A seasonal dimension further aggravates problems of inadequate work, health risks and other disadvantages that poor people face. In winters of cold weather climates, these include enduring isolation and cold. When asked how her family survived the winter, a poor woman from Ak Kiya, Kyrgyz Republic replied, “It was difficult. Children didn’t have food for five to six days.”

Box 5.3 Sick, Weak and Cannot Work Well

In rural Ghana a poor and old widow borrowed money to pay for the coffin and funeral when her husband died. She lives now as a day worker. She manages to buy soap, but not clothes. The amount paid to her for a day’s weeding is small, but “she admitted that because she is old, she cannot weed much so that people who employ her do so just for kindness.”

In the words of a report from Egypt, “the poorer group in the community cannot afford to treat themselves. This causes them to feel tired, or illness eventually disables them. At the end, illness and inability to afford medical treatment decreases the ability to work in poorer households.”
In the rainy seasons of tropical climates many disadvantages afflict poor rural people at the same time, including shortages of food, indebtedness, sickness, and hard work. Researchers in Khaliajuri, Bangladesh note that "due to minimum food intake in crisis period, men and women cannot do labor-intensive work. Consequently, they do not get proper wages from the employer on time." The hungry and weak may then not only be paid less, they may be paid less reliably. There and elsewhere in the study, rainy seasons can be times of exhaustion; sickness (such as malaria, Guinea Worm disease, dengue fever, diarrheas, skin diseases, eye infections and snakebite—reportedly rampant in one Ghanaian site); discomfort in cold, wet, dirty and unsanitary conditions; flooding and landslides; leaks and collapse of housing; isolation from markets, supplies and services; malnourishment; and neglect of children. It is a time when children most waste and die. The rains are also a time of agonizing choices, when adults are tired, sick, and hungry; a time of having to trade off one illbeing against another and of choosing who in the family will suffer.

Figure 5.1 Body Syndrome

![Body Syndrome Diagram](image)

- Hungry → Sick
  - Weak
  - Less Food
  - Cultivate Less
  - Able to Do Less
  - Work Less Often
  - Less Able to Bargain
  - Less Medical Treatment, Later, Lower Quality
  - Paid Less
  - Less Money
Body Blows: How Injury, Illness and Their Costs Impoverish

We face a calamity when my husband gets ill. Our life comes to a halt until he recovers and goes back to work.
—A poor woman, Zawyce Sultan, Egypt

Poor people cannot improve their status because they live day by day, and if they get sick then they are in trouble because they have to borrow money and pay interest.
—A woman, Tra Vinh, Vietnam

Poor people from very different contexts remark on the incidence and impact of injury and illness. These effects are perhaps less conspicuous as a general phenomenon at the group and community level than at the personal and household level where they can be dramatic and disastrous. Their devastating effects are borne out in selected case studies of individuals and households where illness, injury and death are common triggers that make poor people poorer (see also chapter 11).

Participants in India and Vietnam emphasize how impoverishing injury and illness can be. The India National Report concludes that “expenditure on health appeared to be by far the strongest impediment for a poor household to remain afloat. Households with sick and elderly people were invariably on the brink, on account of heavy expenditure on treatment of the patients.”

Similarly in Vietnam long-term illness or death is one of the most frequently mentioned reasons for family difficulties. In Ho Chi Minh City a research team reports:

Any serious illness in a poor family will inevitably aggravate their poverty, since there is seldom enough money in hand to cover the cost of treatment hospitalization. Some families sell their house, if they have one to sell, in order to pay such costs, or borrow money from loan sharks for this purpose, which leads to a further loan being taken to repay the first.

Case studies (see box 5.4) also illustrate how disabling, costly, sudden and devastating illness and injury can be for poor households, especially when a breadwinner or other active adult is struck down. A common scenario starts with an immediate loss of income from work. The sick or injured person needs care. Either the afflicted person goes without treatment, or the costs impoverish the family; assets are sold and debts taken on. A downward spiral begins from which there is no recovery. Food becomes scarce and children malnourished. Children are withdrawn from school to save money and to work. The poor household becomes permanently poorer.
Box 5.4 How Accidents and Sickness Make People Poor

Accident and permanent disability

A man from Hi Afweyin, Somaliland is 50 years old. His livestock died from disease. He then worked as a porter loading and unloading trucks. A pile of food grains fell on him when he was carrying a 50-kilogram sack, breaking his left hand and right leg. He was bedridden for about a month. The children were very young, and the family had nothing to survive on. One child died of malnutrition. Since then he has been handicapped, and the family depends on gifts from neighbors and relatives. He has no aspirations because, he says, “We have no wealth, nor am I strong enough to improve the situation.”

Costly but ineffective treatment

A man in Lao Cai, Vietnam is 26 years old. His family has 12 members. They used to be one of the richest families in the village, but now they are one of the poorest. In recent years they have suffered two shocks. First, his father died two years ago. That left only two main laborers in the family—him and his mother, aged 40. He has two young children. Two years ago, his daughter also had a serious illness and needed an operation. His family had to sell four buffaloes, one horse, and two pigs to cover the expenses of getting treatment. The operation cost several million VND, but she is still not cured. All the people in his community helped, but no one can contribute more than 20,000 VND. His younger brother—who was studying in grade 6, had to leave school to help his family. The man says that if his daughter had not been ill, his family would still have many buffaloes, he could have a house for his younger brother, and his younger brother could study further.

Disability and costs of treatment combined

A woman in Gerawra, Lidia is 30 years old and the mother of four daughters, the eldest of whom is seven and the youngest still in her lap. Her husband used to work in a dairy, cleaning buffaloes. For over a year now he has been suffering from diabetes and can no longer do labor-intensive work. To raise money for her husband’s treatment she sold her house and her land to another resident of the village for Rs 1,300, although the actual current value was over Rs 20,000. She knows she was underpaid but feels indebted to the buyer because he has allowed her to retain a small room in the house to keep her ailing husband and children. She has taken over supporting the family by carrying on her head wood for fuel a distance of about 10 kilometers every other day. She has little hope for the future. She lives hand to mouth, for her daily earnings barely suffice for 2 kilograms of rice a day. Her daughters do not go to school, and she is hardly keen that they should do so. She laments the closure of the government ration shop, due to corruption, where her red card let her purchase subsidized rice and oil.

adult dies, the ratio of dependents to adults jumps up. Where an active adult is permanently disabled and dependent, it is even worse, with a person who cannot earn but must be fed.
Health expenditures wipe out savings. The more a poor household has saved and accumulated, the more it has to lose. But often the poorer cannot obtain or afford health treatment. So those who are most exposed to health risks, whose work entails most risk of accident or debilitation, and who are most dependent on the strength of their bodies—in short, those who need health care most—are those who can afford and obtain it least. And when they do obtain it, they are the most impoverished by the cost, having to sell assets and take on debt.

Troubles with Treatment

We do not go to the hospital because it is necessary to bring our bed linen, dishes, sometimes even a bed.

—A young women Muynak, Uzbekistan

You go to the hospital, you have to get a number, you go to the guard, the nurses are chatting. You have to wait until they fancy giving you a number... “Is the doctor here?” “No, the doctor isn’t here.” They lie.

—A 25-year-old woman in Los Jureis, Argentina

The importance to poor people of access to good affordable health care is difficult to exaggerate.

This is not just for reasons of love and compassion for close relatives and others who are sick, or concern for personal bodily wellbeing. Again and again it is also for livelihood and survival. Good treatment relieves pain and suffering; it is also an investment in restoring the body as means of gaining a livelihood.

It is not surprising that poor people so often simply do not go for treatment. As explored below, poor people face problems of distance, transportation, time required for travel, suffering or danger of death while traveling, shortages or lack of medicines, costs (for transportation, treatment, bribes, and medicine), discrimination that humiliates and delays in treatment, staff absenteeism, callousness, and ineffective treatment—all or some of which can combine as disincentives in any one situation, amplified by uncertainties at every step.

Very many poor people in the study thus regard accessible, effective and affordable health treatment as a priority when ranking institutions of local importance. The patterns vary, however. In Malawi especially, all groups give clinics and hospitals high ratings (first to fourth place) for importance, for reasons including medical care, early childhood clinics, prenatal clinics, and reducing mortality of both adults and children. Elsewhere, the priorities that men, women, youth and the elderly attach to health facilities varied. In Khallajuri in Bangladesh middle-aged women and old men cared the most. In Egypt women rate them higher than men, except for men who are manual laborers and men with chronic illnesses.
Women generally focus more on health problems of the family than on their own health problems.

Participants in Africa and in Eastern Europe and Central Asia feel that health care is becoming less accessible, less affordable and worse. The picture is more mixed in Latin America and the Caribbean and in Asia.

**Lacking Physical Access and Medicines**

*While you are healthy it is OK, but if you get a snakebite that is not simple, you have to go to Los Jures and hope to God it's not a stormy day with much rain. How would you get a sick person out of here? Walking it is impossible, a vehicle would not get out, you could not go by horse—how long does it take to go by horse?! The ill person would die!*

—A young woman, Los Jures, Argentina

Distance to health-care facilities, problems and costs of reaching them, and lack of medicines often make obtaining treatment difficult.

In Africa and elsewhere, people report a sheer lack of health posts, clinics and hospitals—and discouraging distances to the ones that exist. Rural areas suffer the most marked lack of services. In discussing problems in obtaining medical care, participants in parts of Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Somaliland and Zambia mention the long distances that have to be traversed more often than problems of cost or quality. The same is true at least in parts of Bangladesh, Brazil, Bulgaria, and Jamaica. The study teams heard of people dying or babies being born ("under the tree") on the way to hospital. In Malawi an increase in disease, especially HIV/AIDS, has made the lack of accessible facilities a more pressing problem.

In a number of countries, the lack of drugs at treatment centers compounds the problems of distance and transportation. In Malawi, researchers report men’s and women’s groups as saying they used to have drugs at a health center 10 kilometers away, "but these days when we go there we are told there are no drugs and we travel all the 30 kilometers to Mangochi to get treatment"; "...there is no medicine to treat people with. We just trouble ourselves traveling to the hospital just to get two aspirin tablets." "In the past we also used to have an ambulance which transported serious patients to Mangochi, but these days we are told to hire cars, so where do they expect us to go get cash?" As they put it, "Diseases are not ending due to lack of medicine."

**Time Spent**

The time taken to travel, get treated, buy medicines and return is a widespread complaint and a disincentive to going for treatment at all (see box 5.5); it is aggravated by discrimination in favor of those of higher status and
Box 5.5 Keeping Poor People Waiting

In Bangladesh, a woman's group at Madaripur notes that the duty doctor in the hospital ignored them and gave preference to the patients wearing good clothes. People have little trust and confidence in government health-care centers because the doctors there often take fees from patients, which they are not supposed to do.

A poor woman in El Matariia, Egypt says, "Sometimes I stay for long hours until I can see one of the doctors, then afterwards, the nurse comes and tells me that he is not coming or he came but he will not be able to see me."

In Plovdiv, Bulgaria, a mixed group of women and men says that "the doctors should be kind and polite; they had taken a special oath this is their business. They have to be welcoming and to talk with everybody to listen to one's problems. But they are not. Most of them are quite rude; they make the people wait for several hours at their office doors while they drink coffee inside."

those who could pay bribes. A 25-year-old mother in Los Jurjes, Argentina, describes what can happen:

The people in town...can go in the afternoon. We in the country get up at 6 a.m. to take the collective bus. We arrive. We go to the doctor at the hospital. You arrive at 8 a.m. or sometimes not until 1 p.m. You are stuck there until the afternoon, without eating, without being able to drink a mate (traditional drink) first, so as not to lose time...you spend hours and hours hungry. You have to go back before the doctor has seen you. You miss the bus. You have to go however you can...so you can get home, even walking.

Financial Costs

We are not allowed to get sick anymore because we have to pay for medication...what with?

—An older man, Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Poverty makes them helpless in the face of diseases as the health services are too expensive for them.

—A man, Nchimbu, Zambia

Before medical treatment was free, now one has to pay for everything.

—An unemployed man, Ivanovo, Russia
I have a daughter who came from Esmeraldas with pains in her legs...I have no means to take her to the doctor...that's why I say that life is sad, because I don't have any way to pay for a doctor, an injection or anything.

—A woman, Isla Trinitaria, Ecuador

The high costs of treatment and drugs are problems in countries as diverse as Bosnia and Herzegovina, India, Kyrgyz Republic, Malawi, Russia, Uzbekistan and Zambia. Costs have risen for different reasons: official policy in some cases, corruption in others, and frequently both. In consequence, poor people tend to be excluded or to exclude themselves. As a researcher in Belasovka, Russia notes, “In cases of sickness, the patient has to buy his own medicines, which, considering average income rates, is practically impossible if the illness is really serious.” The costs compound the stress of sickness. In Los Jarales, Argentina the president of the Neighborhood Commission says “...it is not enough that a doctor gives you a prescription if you can’t afford to buy it...if you don’t even have enough to eat, then the doctor gives you a prescription of $30, that does not cure a thing, on the contrary, it is worse, what with the worry that it causes.”

In Bower Bank, Jamaica a daughter of a mother of eight was badly burned with boiling water. She took her daughter to hospital. She had no money, but managed to beg the money to register her. However, she could not pay for the treatment her daughter received. Later her daughter needed to return because she could not use her hand properly. But the hospital would not see her until the earlier bill for treatment was paid.

Even when there are pro-poor reforms that make health care more accessible, the poorest can still experience problems. In one Indonesian community, medical facilities have improved, but the documentation requirements remain a problem for the poorest. Although entitled to free treatment, they have to have a health card, which they have difficulty obtaining. Those without the card have to borrow money or postpone going to a hospital until their illness becomes severe. In Ethiopia, during several recent epidemics of diarrhea and typhoid, many poor people were reported to have died before they could complete the long process to receive the certification they needed for free hospital care.

**The Behavior of Medical and Health Staff**

*The hospital is like a prison.*

—Participant, discussion group of men and women, Magadan, Russia

Poor people complain about the lack of medical staff. Understaffing is noted in Brazil and Nigeria, and absenteeism in Bangladesh and Egypt. When staff are present, say poor people in Bangladesh, they give rushed and ineffective consultations. In Borg Meghezel, Egypt people receive what is meant to be
free medical care, but villagers report, "There isn’t a single tablet in the clinic and the doctor has turned it into his private clinic." Elsewhere, poor people say that the absence of physicians is critical in emergencies and that people are given the same pills for everything. In other countries, poor people report wide discrimination against them, rudeness, and corruption.

Preferential treatment goes to those who are well dressed, or have influence or money, while those without money are penalized. In El Mataria, Egypt a woman says, "At the hospital they do nothing to people unless they are staff relatives, or rich people that have power or authority." Another participant in El Mataria says, "One time my leg was broken and I went to the hospital for treatment. I was shocked when the doctor told me that "you are all right and you do not have a broken leg." I went to a private doctor as I had no other choice." In Belaskova, Russia remarks made by discussion group participants include "You have to pay the dentist; otherwise, they just stuff your tooth with sand and it all falls out." In Takhtakupyr, Uzbekistan two men were taken to the hospital and diagnosed to have life-threatening poisoning from having drunk bad vodka. The man with relatives who could put up the money for treatment survived. The second man, with no family to pay for him, died.

In Sofia, Bulgaria a special discussion group was held with nurses and a participant there might have been speaking for many other nurses in saying:

There are elderly people who spend half the week in the hospital. They just refuse to understand that there are also other people who are ill, that the times are different now. They accuse us. Or there are others who start explaining that they are old, that they have no money for medicines. Then they start insulting us. Or they complain: "So when we grow old, you do not need us any more and want us to die (kutcheta ni jali—let the dogs eat us)." As if we can change something. There is no money for free drugs. I cannot feel [good] when there are people abandoned by everybody like them, and me not being able to do anything.

When whole health systems are stressed, it is hard for good staff as well as for patients.

Poor Quality

Whoever goes to the health clinic healthy comes out sick.
—Participant, discussion group of men and women, Borg Meghezel, Egypt

Poor people are sensitive to quality. Talking of the hospital in Los Jureles, Argentina a group of men call it an important institution, but "you go and they don’t attend to you, there are no medicines, it’s a disaster." In La Calera,
Ecuador a young man says, “In the hospitals they don’t provide good care to the indigenous people like they ought to; because of their illiteracy they treat them badly...they give us other medicines that are not for the health problem you have.” In one village in Vietnam nearly all the families interviewed say that they took, or will take, family members to the border security guards who have some medical training and supplies to treat more serious illnesses. The health station and the border post are the same distance, and treatment and medication at both are free. But as a man explains, “People don’t go to the medical station because the professional skills of the health workers are low.”

**Positive Experiences**

*Whenever we get sick, we go to the government hospital and get cured.*

— A 38-year-old poor woman, Vellu, Sri Lanka

Against the depressing backdrop of ineffective government services, a few positive experiences are also reported.

Poor people widely appreciate food and income support programs. Programs like Samurdhi (a subsidy program) in Sri Lanka, ration shops supplying cheap or free food to the poorest in India, food stamps in Jamaica, soup kitchens in Argentina and Ecuador, and the food supplied to a refugee camp in Bosnia and Herzegovina provide a partial floor under the poorest, mitigating their destitution and providing at least part of their basic needs for food. In Barrio Sol y Verde in Argentina women rate the local health post highly: “We go there more than anywhere for medicines...and there are boxes of groceries for old people, and they give you milk every day.” In Dock Sud, Argentina a group of women rate the health post top of all institutions, saying, “it is important because they are the only ones who provide care for us.” The Brazil National Report notes that the most striking aspect of participants’ assessment of institutions is that, despite the ubiquitous criticisms of government and politicians, the people very positively evaluate governmental community health programs and food distribution schemes.

In health services, contrasting with the frequently grim picture of lack of access, discrimination, corruption, and inadequate treatment, some good examples do stand out.

Participants generally appreciate local workers more than those who work in distant clinics and hospitals. Village doctors in Bangladesh are an example. In Brazil poor people highly praise the programs that provide health care to people in their places of residence and unanimously regard them as very efficient. This high regard extends to the health community officers and staff of Saúde em Casa of whom it is said in Jabaquara, despite some queuing and rationing: “If the problem cannot be solved there...they take us to hospital...they give preference to senior citizens...they have a general practitioner, a dentist...it is very good for the community.” As often in other contexts, poor people trust and value local workers and institutions.
Elsewhere, in the midst of bad practice, poor people point to outstanding, selfless and committed individuals who provide good service. For example:

- In Bangladesh men at Gowainghat identify the government family planning worker as one of the most important institutions because, they say, he stands by them in their moments of crisis. He takes information and prescribes medicines for sick people. He even collects medicine for them when he does not have it himself. Above all he gives them good advice.

- In Malawi a group of poor men and women say that in 1997 the Ministry of Health and Population sent a staff member from Zomba Central Hospital to help a village health committee. “He is a hardworking man because he can come any time when called or even at night. He does not favor anybody; he treats us equally.”

- In Nigeria a clinic is seen as “the toast and savor of the community” in Ekele Rumuokoro. It was founded because of restricted access to the hospitals and clinics in Port Harcourt. It is available to poor people and ready to help with their health problems. The clinic allows patients to pay their bills in installments and even dispenses drugs free to those who cannot pay. The proprietor readily refers cases he cannot handle to hospitals that can do so, in contrast with the practice of some unscrupulous clinic owners who will keep the patient to die and then charge a high bill.

- In Los Jarjes, Argentina a young woman says of a private doctor, “You go at any time and he sees to you. You go day or night, whatever the time is: he gets up and sees to you.... We go and we say to him, look doctor today we haven’t got enough for the consultation...he sees us. Now he has a pharmacy... take all the medicines you need and pay me when you have it...all our family give thanks to this doctor....”

Even where corruption is believed to be rampant, there can be surprises. In Ivanovo, Russia one man in a discussion group of unemployed had been treated recently in a hospital and his arm was still bandaged. He felt rather awkward in telling the others he had been given medicine and injections, all free: “I was surprised myself.”

Though it is rare for mainline government health systems to be well regarded, two exceptions stand out: newly created federal health schemes are highly rated at five areas in Brazil, and in Sri Lanka poor people appreciate and usually hold in high regard the government health service as a whole. There is, to be sure, one hospital that is not visited because the doctor is said to be callous with patients, and one case where a man reports that he had paid money to get a doctor’s care, but these were exceptions. Elsewhere in Sri Lanka, and more typically, there are remarks like “The village people believe
that doctors and the facilities available at this hospital are excellent" and "The two new doctors are very kind to patients." There is also a sense of service getting better, as was articulated by a discussion group participant in Ihalagama, Sri Lanka:

> About two years ago, as medicine was not available at the hospital, we had to get it from private pharmacies. Now it is not so. The hospital has undergone a cleanup, and now more doctors are present and the hospital pharmacy has enough medicines. We do not have to go to private pharmacies any more.

**Private Treatment**

Participants often value traditional and private treatment, finding it more accessible, easier to pay for and faster.

Traditional and private treatment is usually closer to hand than formal health services, requiring less travel. In Lao Cai villages in Vietnam, taking a sick child to the commune health center, which might be 2 to 6 kilometers away, means that the family could lose a day's labor. Along the same lines, a woman in Salalamkulan, Sri Lanka, who had asthma, went for private treatment because she could not wait for hours in the government hospital. Local practitioners might also make home visits.

Arrangements for payment are usually flexible: even if traditional and private treatment are more expensive, payment can typically be deferred, or given in kind or through labor. Exceptionally, poor people could have the best of both worlds: the Chirambo Mission Hospital in Muchinga, Zambia, is reported to be "very helpful to the community by allowing them to pay for medical services in kind—beans, chickens, and maize."

**The Challenge**

There is perhaps no better way to sum up the development challenge on health than to note the starkly contrasting experiences reported during the study.

Poor people in Sri Lanka, for instance, have basic food support in the Samurdi program and access to good state-provided medical services. From Ihalagama, Sri Lanka, researchers note, "Villagers say they are lucky to have hospitals which provide free medical services. Otherwise they would have died long ago."

Elsewhere, poor people are denied treatment by poverty and lack of services. For example, in Ethiopia an old man says:

> Poverty snatched away my wife from me. When she got sick, I tried my best to cure her with tebel [holy water] and wokabi [spirits], for these were the only things a poor person could
afford. However, God took her away. My son too was killed by malaria. Now I am alone.

In Malawi, of those who cannot afford transport to hospital, and who cannot pay for private treatment, it is said, “they just sleep and groan.”

Notes

[This chapter draws much of its evidence from poor people’s descriptions and analyses of wellbeing and illbeing, of problems and priorities, of causes and impacts of poverty, their experiences with institutions, and also from case studies. While health concerns frequently emerge from these topics, the discussions generally did not focus on specific health issues and their impacts on particular social groups, such as poor women, men, elderly and children.]
Chapter 6

Gender Relations in Troubled Transition

Summary

Women's and men's roles are going through major changes, creating turmoil at the household level. In many cases male unemployment and deepening economic stress have placed greater responsibilities on women to seek paid work. Some women are finding that their increased earnings help to increase their decision-making authority in the household, but the extent of changes reported vary widely across countries and communities. Women report heavy work burdens as they add livelihood responsibilities to their household duties.

Men express humiliation and anger over being unable to maintain their role as the household's main or sole breadwinner. Discussion groups indicate rising alcohol and drug abuse among men and increased domestic conflicts. Physical violence against women is widespread and has increased in some communities. However, in others levels of domestic physical violence are declining. This is associated with women's increased economic role and with increased awareness, participation in women's groups, and supportive actions by NGOs, churches, the media and in some cases, the police.
are benefiting from reduced barriers to trade. There and in Latin America and the Caribbean a growing service sector has also opened up opportunities for women. In many communities around the world men and women mention that women are more willing than men to take up menial and very low-paying work.

Participants in discussion groups from Kowerani Masasa, Malawi explain that “times have changed” and women “need not rely on their husbands” but rather “have to complement” them by working because men “do not have well-defined [substantive] means of livelihood.” In Doryuma, Ghana, researchers observe similarly, “women have taken over some of the functions of their husbands like providing for all the needs of the children and making decisions because the men are not gainfully employed.” A discussion group of men and women from Unuobata Road, Nigeria explains that women assume the responsibilities for paying school fees, purchasing clothing, and providing food when the husband is jobless or deceased; even when husbands do bring in income, women also supplement household expenses.

In the village of El Gawaber, Egypt women are working less on family farms and engaging increasingly in wage labor. In the village of Daishour, Egypt women purchase a basket of vegetables on credit or bake bread to sell in the market, “however little they may gain.” The researchers in El Gawaber observe, however, that men are reluctant to admit this change as it is a sign of their own inability to provide for the household.

In India women in rural and periurban households are also taking on increased responsibility for bringing income into the household. They often engage in petty trades like selling wood for fuel and are making a “significant contribution toward meeting household expenditure.” In Bangladesh increasing numbers of poor women are taking part in NGO-supported activities, which has boosted their incomes as well as their workloads. With the availability of credit, women are also engaged in self-employment activities like cattle and poultry raising and petty trade.

In Villa Atamiaqui, Argentina a discussion group of 21 women rate unemployment among women as a pressing problem. They explain that men spend three or four months at a time out of the house and while some women find work providing domestic services in the cities, they have to leave the children with grandparents. Many times both parents never return. The increase in both male and female migration has been propelled by farming and herding difficulties in the wake of a dramatic drop in the water levels in a local river. In Atacucho, Ecuador a 23-year-old poor mother says that the situation of women is difficult because of extremely low wages: “Some mothers work as domestic employees for 250,000 sucres per month. You know how much bus fare costs these days; they have little money left for anything else.”

Gender differences in educational status and expansion of the service industry also contribute to women’s increased economic roles in the region. In both Brazil and Jamaica discussion groups indicate that women often have more education and job opportunities than do men. In Jamaica, for instance,
there is discrimination against men for several types of urban jobs, and women feel they have better chances of getting hired. Women are even working in construction, traditionally considered a male preserve. The report for Florencio Varela, Argentina notes, “For men, if they are more than 35 years old, not a single place will take them.” In Brazil, meanwhile, many factories have left the São Paulo area, and men have been the most affected. The researchers there say that “sectors that typically employ men, e.g., construction industry and manufacturing, are in decline whereas the service industry is expanding space.”

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia a very different set of forces has led to the double bind of female and male unemployment. With the collapse of the communist system, women who were primarily employed in the service industry and as civil servants have lost their previous livelihoods and are increasingly involved in trading and the informal sector. Many women are becoming their family’s main breadwinner in the transition. Women from the village of Achy in the Kyrgyz Republic, for instance, report that they make crafts and beautiful bedclothes to sell. A 41-year-old mother of five from Orenbargy, Uzbekistan says, “To be able to feed my children, I have been selling sunflower seeds in Urada [a district in Tashkent] for four years. I go there 3-4 days since 1995...When my brother heard about it, he reproached me and said it was shameful. I stopped going...”

Women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia are also increasingly involved in trading activities that take them across the country borders, away from home for days and sometimes months. Researchers in the Kyrgyz Republic observed in the village of Achy that “most of the rural men found themselves unemployed, while rural women who used to stay at home and obey their husbands began trading.” Since 1993, they note, women have been involved in shuttle trade (also known as “bazaar economy”) and chetnochny business (that of traveling to other towns and even countries to purchase goods and products for resale). Liberalization of the economy underway in the country has created better opportunities for trade, especially for women. Urban and, to some extent, rural women travel to Kazakhstan, Russia, Uzbekistan, and even more remote countries such as the Arab Emirates, India, Iran, Italy, Pakistan, Syria, Thailand, and Turkey, where they go on buying tours, and resell goods in the Kyrgyz Republic. Discussion group participants explain that it is easier for the women to undertake this kind of trade, as they are better at handling the authorities at the borders (police, customs officials and taxation authorities). Women are better at “gritting their teeth and getting on with the work” and in resisting the harassment meted out to them at the border. Women also feel that women traders are more likely to bring home their earnings, unlike most male traders who “spend their money on vodka with friends."

It also seems that a growing number of women are taking over as heads of households. In Ivanovo, Russia where woman are said to have greater opportunities as street peddlers and in selling food in the market, discussion groups mention a growing trend of women driving “the husband out of the
house because he doesn’t earn money.” Apart from male unemployment, female-headed households can be triggered by civil strife, divorce and desertion, a husband’s migrating away from home for long periods, a husband’s ill health or death, or women simply deciding to live without a male partner. In Kowerani Masasa, Malawi discussion group participants report women take over because they are divorced, widowed or have “irresponsible” husbands. The researchers in Jamaica note that growing numbers of women have entered the work force at the same time as men have faced rising unemployment, resulting in a new phenomenon of women becoming their families’ chief breadwinners. In Little Bay, Jamaica for instance, women are increasingly involved in the fishing industry as well as farming.

In Burao, Somaliland the women’s discussion groups estimate that women are the breadwinners in almost 70 percent of the households. And, as the researchers from Burao note:

The participants agreed that opportunities have improved for women, which is probably the only positive thing that came out of the conflict. Because women could move across the territorial borders of warring clans and could culturally belong to any clan they marry into, they had taken over almost all small-to-middle-sized trade and business. This provided women with a lot of economic clout in the family and at the community levels.

**Increased Work Burden of Women**

These men now have realized that we women are overworking and the work itself is tiresome.

——A woman, Mbwadzulu, Malawi

While women may be working outside the home in larger numbers than ever before, the demanding responsibilities of running a household remain largely with them. In Ethiopia participants generally feel that “the more the men become jobless, the heavier the burden on the women.” As a woman from Boce, Brazil puts it very clearly, “Women have really managed to improve their lives, to be more independent, but there is no doubt that they are overloaded.” Similarly the research team in Oq Oltyn, Uzbekistan reports, “[Women] are taking more responsibility for providing for their families, but they also do the same amount of housework as before. On the whole, this means that they have to work more than they used to.”

In Indonesia both men and women participants agreed that stereotypical gender roles in the household have not changed much in the last 10 years even as women have taken up more work outside the household. “It is both our destiny and old tradition that women should be playing a bigger role than men in the household,” a woman from Ampenan Utara explains. Researchers in Vietnam stress that women are “quite clearly overworked,” with consequences that include increased health problems. Women there say
they have little time for outside activities such as evening literacy classes, community events or even informal socializing.

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the collapse of all forms of state support have added to women's burdens. Working women before (typically in state enterprises or as civil servants) enjoyed access to childcare, health care and schools for children. Not surprisingly, discussion groups of women from Latin America as well as Eastern Europe and Central Asia frequently mention a pressing need for day care.

**Household Gender Roles: A Blurred Divide**

Women are working at the market while men are cooking.
—A man, Kok Yangak, Kyrgyz Republic

Before they [men] were like the master and señor...
Not lifting a finger in the house.... Things are changing slowly, but they are changing.
—A woman, Florencio Varela, Argentina

It is Allah who has differentiated women's and men's responsibilities. It will culturally be out of the way and shameful if a man does any of women's responsibilities.
—A man, Miti Kolo, Ethiopia

Both women's and men's traditional gender roles are changing, sometimes marginally, sometimes more dramatically. Increasingly, household budgets depend on women's earning capacities. The increase in women's relative economic power shatters the generally accepted image of the man as the breadwinner. According to researchers in Russia, "Unlike the unemployment of a woman, unemployment of a man is seen as a huge violation of the norm, which dramatically affects his role also of a husband and father." The report adds that the division of gender roles started blurring a long time ago. With the notion of "man as the provider for the family and the woman taking care of the home" so deeply rooted in people's minds, it is only after years of widespread unemployment that the violation of these traditional roles has become more explicit.

Examples of men stepping in to assume household responsibilities are few and scattered. Isolated incidents of men sharing some of the "female" responsibilities include when the wife is unwell, away visiting relatives, attending to other social obligations, or when work keeps her away from the home for long periods (Bangladesh, Brazil, Indonesia, Malawi and Zambia). In Indonesia the researchers find that only men who are 35 or younger are helping out more with housework and childcare, and then only when their wives obtain a factory job or go overseas to work. The researchers add that casual work by women doesn't seem to merit additional help from husbands with household chores.
There are also cases of almost complete role reversals, with the men assuming the bulk of the cooking, cleaning and looking after children. Typically, this occurs where men are unemployed and at home, while women bring home the wages (Argentina, Bulgaria, Ecuador, Jamaica and the Kyrgyz Republic). As a woman in Dock Sud, Argentina puts it, "Now there are more men who help at home. The men are gaining awareness... They are only a few, but they are changing. If the woman works and earns more, the men take care of the children and even take them to school sometimes."

Reports from Argentina, Ecuador and Jamaica and, to some extent, from Bulgaria and Russia, suggest that some women prefer to be independent of men once they have access to some economic resources. A Russian woman, for instance, shares that "it is easier now to survive alone with a child than with a husband in the family." In some communities in Jamaica female-headed households are perceived to be the best off in the community. The presence of domestic violence, in addition to economic independence, is sometimes mentioned as a factor pushing women to manage households on their own. Women from Latin America and the Caribbean especially speak of having gotten the confidence to move out of abusive relationships, and this, reports a study participant from Jamaica, is "because the women can now afford to have separate homes."

**Decisionmaking at the Household Level**

> When I was working I used to decide. When she is working, she owns her money and does anything she wishes.
> —A man, Vila Junqueira, Brazil

> They exercise some rights. They decide on how much salt or pepper is needed for the household. This is because they know these things.
> —A man, Kajima, Ethiopia

Most women report that they participate more in household decisions compared with 10 years ago, but the extent of change varies quite widely from country to country and community to community. A small positive change for women in a traditionally conservative culture can be experienced as a big change, while still falling far short of equity. Where women are actively seeking equity and significant changes in gender roles and identities, this is strongly linked to their rising economic power, and generally associated with changes in male attitudes and growing awareness about gender inequities because of church activities, NGO programs, education and the media.

The diversity of cultures and contexts across the study countries makes comparisons of shifts in power relations at the household level very difficult. In some communities the changes reported can be quite small. As a man from a discussion group in Nehimichi, Zambia explains, "Generally it is the men who make major decisions about the use of finances. The wife is only
consulted, and her advice may not be taken.” In many communities men and women report that men continue to be responsible for major decisions (e.g., the purchase or sale of assets). With some frequency, however, women acknowledge having gained more decision-making power over household budgets, food purchase and consumption patterns, and children’s education, health care and marriage. In some places they also can influence decisions on types of crops to be planted, their own travel and employment, the use of family planning methods and, in very rare cases, divorce.

An interesting illustration of the different meaning of change can be found in comparing women’s views in Bangladesh and Jamaica. In general, most women from both these countries feel that they can take more part in decision-making processes at home and feel more “free” and confident. However, the two groups are referring to very different types of freedom. In Bangladesh women feel they have more freedom because their husbands now permit them to move outside the house to buy groceries and attend women’s group meetings. The women thus feel they have more contact with the outside world and have some control over the household budgets. At the urban sites in Jamaica women talk about their freedom to choose family planning methods, as well as the confidence to walk out of an abusive relationship. Importantly, similar trends could not be found in rural Jamaica.

While exceptions are found everywhere, some communities in Asia, Egypt and Ethiopia seem to be at one end of the spectrum, where local customs and tradition continue to dictate the roles men and women are expected to play within a household and community, whereas some urban communities in Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador and Jamaica seem to lie at the other end, with women there expressing a need for, and gaining, more freedom and independence.

Inequitable gender roles are reported in Indonesia in the eastern islands of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT), where local customs and tradition define the lower status of women. “A woman is a second-class creature and belis [bought] by her husband, by paying the agreed price to her parents in cash, cattle, and other assets. A ‘bought woman’ is not expected to have opinions; her sole contractual obligation is to obey and serve her husband.”

In South Asia (Bangladesh and India) in the communities studied women say they are now more involved in handling household budgets as well as in decisions related to their children’s education and marriage.

Some slow but positive changes come from Africa. In Somaliland women see the increase in their decision-making power as a result of the war, when men were either away from home for a long period or were restricted in their movements. In Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria and Zambia a positive link is found between women’s earning capacity and their role in household decisions. A discussion group from Adalco, Ghana laughed loudly when asked whether the women have more or less power in the household. The researchers note that the men believe “women have virtually become the landlords [household heads].”

In some fazendas of Brazil, many women identify a strong relationship between their income and their decision-making authority in the household. In
one community, the women list "the decision to separate from the husband" and "to lodge complaints about aggressive behavior of men" as the top two decisions they can take. They add that they would not have had the courage to take these decisions in the past. A woman from Entra a Pulso relates her income-earning role to freedom and to the power to make decisions: "Today we go out, knocking at every door, looking for a job...this is what making decisions in life is about...it is to feel free."

In Argentina and Ecuador as well, a number of women seem to have gained far more decision-making power at the household level in recent years, especially in urban areas. Again, they link this to their income-earning power, as "decision-making is related to who earns the money." In Florencio Varela, Argentina researchers are told, "Now that the woman goes to work outside the home and takes care of the household expenses with what she earns, she decides many more things."

In addition to economic factors, reports from some countries indicate that a woman's age affects her relative power in the household and the wider community. In Bangladesh, India, the Kyrgyz Republic and Somaliland, older women have more influence in household decisions than younger ones. In Somaliland older women settle minor disputes among women. They also acted as goodwill ambassadors or couriers during peace-making efforts among the clans.

**Male Frustration, Anxiety and Sense of Inferiority**

...if you lose your job outside, you lose the job inside.

---A man, Bower Bank, Jamaica

The unemployed men are frustrated, because they no longer can play the part of family providers and protectors. They live on the money made by their wives and feel humiliated because of that. Suicides among young men have become more frequent.

---An elderly woman, Uchkaun village, the Kyrgyz Republic

Unemployment and loss of economic power accompanied by a relative increase in women's economic power is perceived, especially by many men in the study, as a serious violation of the accepted gender norm. Several men report feelings of humiliation and the sense that they have lost control within the household. According to an elderly man in Kenesh, Kyrgyz Republic,

Before it was clear that the woman is to keep the house and take care of the family, while the man was earning the daily bread. Now the woman buys and sells stuff irrespective of the weather and earns the income for the family, while the man is sitting at home and takes care of the children, fulfills the traditional women's work. This is not right; this is not good.
This emerging male frustration and anxiety is most visible in the reports from Eastern Europe and Central Asia (and to some extent in Latin America and Jamaica) where communities are witnessing rapid changes. Men at several sites talk about the psychological illbeing they feel. Says one man from Ozerry, Russia, "I cannot feed my children normally any more. I feel ashamed to come home." In Kyrgyz Republic, the researchers note that many men fear and oppose their wives' financial independence and ability to develop a career. Some men, especially when they are unemployed, view the success of their wives as their own failure.

In Doryuma, Ghana men who cannot provide a home for their families and rely on their wives are nicknamed "Salomey," or "almost a nonperson in the man's world." Or this from a woman in a discussion group in Entra a Puls, Brazil: "Today when a woman earns more than her husband, he has to obey her...he cannot complain about the kind of work, because it is with this wage that the family is maintained."

In Bower Bank, Jamaica researchers write:

The men stated that their status and position are worsening. They expressed feelings of helplessness at the erosion of their "power" resulting from having less access to work. Both adult men and the younger men seem to be more accommodating of women turning to more than one man to help support the household. One man went as far to say, "If I come home and find a man in my bed, and the woman says to me, 'That man is the one providing the food,' I have to say to her, 'Cover him up better because he is providing the food.'"

The study reveals clearly that male frustration weighs heavily on other members of the household as well, often leading to increasing levels of tension, violence and even family breakdown.

**Domestic Abuse and Violence**

In my home I am abused in ways that I can't even tell...let's not get into it.

— A woman, Vila União, Brazil

Brutes have always beaten and will go on beating their wives.

— A youth, Krasna Poliana, Bulgaria

As part of the discussions on gender relations, participants were asked to define domestic violence and share their perceptions of why domestic violence occurs, and whether they perceive changes in the levels and types of violence in the household. Although the focus was on violence faced by women, the issue was left open to allow people to articulate whether men face some forms of abuse and violence as well. For this analysis, "violence"
refers to physical assaults and "abuse" to verbal and psychological forms of aggression.

**Definitions of Domestic Abuse and Violence**

*There are times when a man hits for the wrong reasons. I think it's fine when he hits me if he's right.*

—A woman, Esmeraldas, Ecuador

In defining domestic violence, participants provide a very wide spectrum of responses across communities—ranging from rape, beating and insults faced by women at one end, to husbands not getting their meals on time or their wives not giving them a massage at night at the other end. Domestic violence also is interpreted in a variety of ways across different gender and age groups within the same communities (see box 6.1). In most cases both women and men also view the violation of social norms and the failure of their partners to play their expected gender roles as domestic abuse and violence.

The reports from a large number of the communities indicate that both women and men are victims of violence and abuse, and both perceive that these behaviors exist in many forms. With some exceptions, discussion groups of men and of women conclude that women endure both more varied and more severe forms of abuse than do men. As one example, the Malawi researchers note that both men and women are identified as victims of beatings, catching sexually transmitted diseases, "being left alone overnight" or locked out of the house, "obscenity," and "selfishness." Women alone, however, also experience rape, being beaten for refusing a proposal, and not having "enough money for the household."

Following in table 6.1 are some of the main types of domestic abuse and violence women and men mention that cut across most of the study sites in the 23 countries.

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**Box 6.1 Men's Perspectives of Violence: Views from Tamale, Ghana**

Men see the insurrection of control river sheanut and dawadawa (the West African locust bean, used in fermented food and seasoning) proceeds from them by the women as a form of violence against men. In the past it was the sole preserve of the man to instruct his wife to pick sheanut and dawadawa from the farm, and the man determined the way proceeds from these should be used.

Some of the men, however, admit that there is some violence against the women, too, because some husbands beat their wives when they refuse to obey what the man says. Some also beat up their wives when they do not readily give in to sex. Consequently, rape is another form of violence committed against women. Some of the men, however, argue that by virtue of the fact that it is the men who pay the bride a price they must have unrestrained access to sex.
Verbal and psychological abuse is the most frequently mentioned form of domestic conflict. While it is directed at both women and men, women appear to be victims of more severe and frequent abuse than do men. This description by a woman from Kawango, Indonesia is typical: “My husband never beats me. We are sometimes engaged in little family disputes but at the most he just chased me and shouted at me.” In Vila Junqueira, Brazil women say that men practice “silence aggression” more than in the past, and they consider this one of the worst forms of mistreatment because they are isolated in their own homes.

Depriving the man or woman of food, shelter or sex is the next most frequently mentioned form of abuse. In Tabe Erc, Ghana a group of women indicate that refusing sex is the most common cause of women being beaten, and often the husband is drunk. They add that this problem is growing worse for women there. Women in Donyumu, also in Ghana, say that wife beating is on the decline and mention other forms of abuse, such as divorce, separation, no “chop money” (for housekeeping), having to endure the husband’s infidelity, men’s refusal to eat what the women cook, and denial of sex. Where women are dependent on their husbands for social and

Table 6.1 Typology of Domestic Abuse and Violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of abuse and violence</th>
<th>Victims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal abuse (crying, demanding, shouting, harsh comments, questioning, etc.)</td>
<td>Women and men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deprivation (denying food, sex, shelter [locking the husband or wife inside], water for bathing, the right to visit friends and relatives, and permission to work outside the home, and restricting freedom, etc.)</td>
<td>Women and men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical abuse (beating, raping, pulling by the hair, throwing out, dragging, “flying dishes,” giving drops and “poutouts,” etc.)</td>
<td>Usually women, sometimes men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking and gambling by men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polygamy (affecting women), promiscuous behavior and casual sex</td>
<td>Women and men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property grabbing (Malawi, Zambia)</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dowry (India, Bangladesh) and bride price (Ghana, Indonesia, Uzbekistan)</td>
<td>Women (also both parents of the bride)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce and desertion</td>
<td>Women, sometimes men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenage pregnancy (Ivorea, Malawi, Zambia, etc.)</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive in-laws (Bangladesh, India, Uzbekistan)</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Abduction and rape were also mentioned in Ethiopia, although it is usually men from outside the family who are involved in these. Similarly, throwing acid at women is one form of physical violence that women face at the community level in Bangladesh. “Ritual murder” was mentioned in one case in Umada Road, Nigeria.
economic support, many view promiscuity, divorce or desertion by a husband as forms of abuse.

In many households across the study communities, physical violence against women appears to be widespread and considered part of everyday life. "A married woman gets beat just as a woman with cattle gets meat" goes a proverb shared by a middle-aged woman from the village of Urmaral in the Kyrgyz Republic. In a number of the villages and slums visited by research teams, the women themselves do not consider domestic violence to be a serious form of mistreatment if it does not occur with great frequency. This, for instance, is the view expressed by a group of women in Umuobwa Road, Nigeria. Similarly, according to an old woman from Mitti Kolo Peasant Association in Ethiopia, "It is sometimes necessary for husbands to beat their wives when they commit mistakes to correct them...it also improves love to be beaten and reconcile...it is also a sign of strong manhood." In some communities, women are also reported to be vulnerable to violence from in-laws.

Selected cases of physical violence against men were reported in Brazil, Ghana, Jamaica, the Kyrgyz Republic and Malawi. In Tabe-Ere, Ghana men point out that women who are physically stronger than their husbands do sometimes beat them. More typically, however, women do not respond to hardships by externalizing their frustrations with physical aggression. When a discussion group of women in Dock Sud, Argentina was asked whether they hit men when they don't have work, a woman responds negatively, adding, "Women get depressed...we're very different from them."

Men and women also view any deviation from the accepted traditional gender norms and roles as acts of abuse. Women feel that unemployment whereby men cannot provide for the household is a form of abuse. In Kok Yangak, the Kyrgyz Republic people say there have been instances in their community of husbands who cannot provide financial support being beaten by their wives and forced out of the house. There are also many cases of men who feel abused if women do not perform expected duties around the home or when their wives go out to work and control decisions at home. In Bangladesh women mention that they find it difficult to take care of their domestic responsibilities when they return home tired after working for wages all day long. When the meals are not prepared well, or when the woman is too tired to massage the husband's legs at night, the husband flares up and shouts at his wife and sometimes beats her up or denies her food. In such cases both the man and the woman feel abused.

**Causes of Domestic Abuse and Violence**

_Sometimes women are hit because lunch is not ready when he gets home._

—A woman, Entra a Pulso, Brazil
It's because of unemployment and poverty that most men in this community beat their wives. We have no money to look after them.

—A man, Teshie, Ghana

In many societal contexts, domestic violence is supported by social norms. Both men and women talk about economic pressures and changing gender roles and relations as leading factors in domestic violence, but they also frequently mention alcohol and drug addiction, gambling, polygamy, and promiscuity. Again, both men and women in many communities refer to violence against women as an accepted behavioral norm, especially when a woman fails to meet expectations of the man or his relatives.

Both men and women in many areas mention that, under economic stress, they have more arguments and there is verbal abuse directed at both men and women. From a discussion group of women in Dock Sud, Argentina, flow these comments: “Men are less patient; they tell you to shut up when they don’t like something or when you want to give your opinion; they are easily angered all the time; if they are without work, they become nervous and take it out on you.” A discussion group of men from Chitambi, Malawi, agree that while women may be better off today with their increased earnings, “we men are not happy because these women are taking advantage of us and they are being rude to us.”

Alcohol and drug abuse is also frequently mentioned. Indeed, as a participant from Bijeljina, Bosnia and Herzegovina describes, much of the physical violence against women occurs when husbands come home drunk: “Under the influence of alcohol a man...spends the money, and sometimes he beats his wife or abuses the children, which creates enormous insecurity and fear in a woman.” In addition to alcohol, people in Argentina and Brazil associate violence with increased drug use. A young woman from Nova California, Brazil remarks, “I think that it is the drugs that make them more aggressive.”

Women’s dependence on their husbands for social and economic support also makes them insecure; thus, many view promiscuity, divorce or desertion by a husband as forms of abuse. According to a group of young men from Freeman’s Hall, Jamaica, the occasions where quarreling among husbands and wives might lead to violence usually involve infidelity: “...only if the woman is not behaving herself [‘giving him bun’], then he would have to beat her.”

In some countries the tradition of the dowry (in India and Bangladesh) or a bride price (Ghana, Indonesia, Uzbekistan) can lead to continued abuse of women because of issues around how much dowry was promised or paid or the sense of owning a woman after “buying” her through bride price (see also box 6.2). A group of women from Ghana report that a girl child may be “tied with a string or rope and given into marriage” as payment for borrowed food or cattle from another family. In Ethiopia, telefa (abduction of women), which can result in rape and desertion or in some cases marriage by
**Box 6.2 A Father's Story**

A poor father in Gowainghat, Bangladesh, while explaining how he got his eldest daughter married to a 50-year-old man, explained, “I had no financial capacity. If I had, I would not give my daughter to marriage with that old man. It was difficult for me to wait to give her to a good marriage as she was young. Bad Muslim boys teased her, and I got afraid. Villagers also blamed me at that time for not getting my daughter married on time.”

He got his second daughter married when she was seven years old. He sold one of his cows, and villagers also helped him by providing some money to give dowry for this marriage. At that age, she was not able to satisfy her husband sexually and do any household work, so her husband and mother-in-law physically tortured her. Sometimes, her husband and mother-in-law stopped giving her food and other daily necessities. To avoid this torture, she returned to her father’s house. After two years of separation, her father got her married again, this time with a 45-year-old widower.

force, is another form of traditional abuse, one that has long-term consequences for women.

In a number of the communities where women’s awareness of their rights is growing and they gain a measure of independence as they secure a livelihood, they are often becoming less tolerant of irresponsible behavior by men. When women argue, ask questions, or answer back, men feel threatened and insecure. In Russia, for instance, people report that it is typical that “the woman starts the quarrel, and the man gives back.” Many men describe the changing traditional roles and values as abuse against them. Men and women (especially older men and women) from several sites felt that women are now more disrespectful toward men—yet another change that has led to domestic conflicts and breakups. In Ekaterinburg, Russia, women explain that “relations have become tougher, because there are more problems. There can be conflicts in the family because the woman makes more money than the man.” In Duckensfield, Jamaica, a group of young women say that as women become more independent they become more intolerant of men’s weaknesses. This same group also indicates that some women are now demanding more from men socially and become violent if the men fail to perform.

**Changes in Levels of Domestic Violence**

Physical violence against women exists in about 90 percent of the study communities where gender violence was discussed. The picture of trends in physical violence in homes over the last 10 years is mixed with strong regional differences (see figure 6.1). In 21 percent of communities, groups
Figure 6.1 Global and Regional Trends in Domestic Violence against Women

**Global**

- Violence reported but trend uncertain: 12%
- Violence rare or not present: 9%
- Increase: 21%
- Same as before: 8%
- Decrease: 30%

**Latin America and the Caribbean**

- Violence reported but trend uncertain: 17%
- Violence rare or not present: 7%
- Increase: 17%
- Same as before: 15%
- Decrease: 44%

**Asia**

- Violence reported but trend uncertain: 23%
- Violence rare or not present: 18%
- Increase: 15%
- Same as before: 3%
- Decrease: 41%

**Eastern Europe and Central Asia**

- Violence reported but trend uncertain: 65%
- Violence rare or not present: 0%
- Increase: 32%
- Same as before: 3%
- Decrease: 0%

**Africa**

- Violence reported but trend uncertain: 30%
- Violence rare or not present: 10%
- Increase: 21%
- Same as before: 10%
- Decrease: 29%
report that physical violence has increased while another 8 percent report that physical violence is at the same levels as before. In another roughly 30 percent of the communities, people speak about the presence of violence, and often mention very high levels, but the discussion groups either disagree on trends or do not identify a trend. However, in 30 percent of the communities visited, discussion groups conclude that physical violence has declined over the last decade.

The extent of violence reported by both men's and women's groups is remarkable both because of the sensitivity of topic and because of the brevity of the researchers' visits with the communities. In many communities the world over, there is still a strong code of silence surrounding violence, with women deeply ashamed and sometimes blaming themselves for their husbands' wrath. In Ethiopia the researchers state that rural women “are not willing to provide information” on “husband-wife relations, violence against women, and conflict in the family” because the topics are too sensitive.

Similarly, the local researchers in the Kyrgyz Republic could not manage to raise the subject of gender violence in four of the smaller communities where everyone knew one another. Instead, they asked discussion groups to consider trends in the “abuse of women's rights on a household level.” Although each of these communities reported the abuse of rights to be increasing, whether this encompasses physical violence cannot be determined and so these reports have been set aside with the others that lack information on the topic and are not part of this analysis. Kyrgyz researchers did discuss violence directly in Urmural, where there are 164 households and the village is “quite transparent, and can be seen like on a palm of your hand.” Discussion groups there reported violence to be absent or very rare, with the exception of one old woman who confided to the researchers that the women in her discussion group “don’t want to talk about it because many of them are beaten by their husbands.” Overall discussions about gender violence were often easier when people reported declines in violence than otherwise.

Where Physical Violence Has Decreased

Men know that we can survive without them, so they will treat us better, men are no longer “lord and savior.”

—A young woman from Bower Bank, Jamaica

The beatings are now less compared to the problem years...
this is because a spouse can be taken to court and people [men] are afraid.

—A man from Nchimish, Zambia

The biggest declines in physical violence against women are found in Latin America and the Caribbean, with 44 percent of the communities reporting decreases where violence was discussed. This is followed by Asia, 41 percent, and Africa, 29 percent, with no declines in Eastern Europe and Central Asia
(see figure 6.1). As mentioned before, in Asia the sample was strongly biased to include only those communities with active NGO presence.

Dramatic declines in physical violence in cultures where traditional gender relations have been inequitable points to the importance of a mix of interventions to reduce physical violence against women in the homes. These findings establish that norms and values about what is tolerable behavior can change in relatively short periods, although deeper change may take longer. It is important to note that even in households where physical abuse of women may be declining, it is not accompanied by a similar decrease in other forms of abuse that women face within the household. Indeed, a large number of discussion groups across the study countries indicate that verbal and psychological abuse may actually be increasing. In addition, even while communities report overall declines from previous levels, violence may remain widespread. For example, in Ecuador, wife battering is mentioned in almost every discussion group by both women and men.

Group discussions in Latin America and the Caribbean identified a complex mix of reasons for declining physical violence in the homes. As unemployed men realize that they are dependent on women’s incomes, the relationship often becomes less physically abusive. Discussion groups also frequently mention women’s greater awareness of their rights through participation in women’s groups organized by churches and NGOs and women’s decreased tolerance of their husband’s abusive behavior.

Women in this region mention a number of options for taking action against abuse, including fleeing to safe houses, filing complaints with women’s police stations, seeking training and counseling, or even leaving abusive marriages. Fears of public humiliation and of being put behind bars appear to act as useful deterrents to male violence against women in some communities.

In Bangladesh women speak of their growing empowerment as well as the contributions of NGOs. Groups of youth and the elderly in Madaripur, Bangladesh, for instance, attribute the decrease in violence against women to increases in literacy and enlightenment as well as livelihood activities. In the words of one young woman, “Women are more powerful than 10 years ago because of self-sufficiency coming from educational and economic empowerment.” In Gowainghat women mention that with NGO support they have seen a reduction in the practice of dowry. In Khalijuri, another community in Bangladesh, women explain that NGOs and the media have raised women’s awareness of their social and legal rights. However, the women also point out that the local village institutions as well as the police and legal systems do not support them when they protest against polygamy and divorce in their village.

In Indonesia 8 out of the 12 communities visited report declining levels of violence against women. The reports from discussion groups in Wulkanabu are typical. Both men’s and women’s groups agree that violence is coming down, with a comment from a women’s group attributing the declines both to women’s changing roles and to increased awareness “because
women have begun learning, been educated and had courage to oppose." The men's groups also credit frequent house visits by church elders, and women's growing role in generating extra income.

Scattered news about declining violence can also be found in Africa. In Doryuma, Ghana some men mention that they used to beat their wives, but not anymore as they realized that beating wives is not a good practice. A man from Mbwadzulu Village of Malawi indicates that violence against women has decreased because "in the past when you quarrelled with a woman and if she reported to the political party, you were beaten... We were not in freedom, I tell you." In three communities in Nigeria, discussion groups generally perceive that violence against women is declining, and the trend is linked directly to women's gains in economic power, education and awareness. However, women in the southeast say female genital mutilation, rape and ritual murder do occur as before, but violence at the household level has decreased. While four communities in Zambia report increased violence, the researchers summarize in their National Report a few factors that study participants think are helping to slow down and reverse the trend (see box 6.3).

While declines in violence were not reported by discussion groups in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, box 6.4 illustrates the case of a mother of five from Uzbekistan who reports that household conflict has "quieted down" after she took a job to help with economic difficulties.

There are a few observations from discussion groups that violence sometimes declines over time within marriages, and some of the reporting may reflect this tendency. From a men's group in Nchimishi, Zambia, "Women are often beaten by their husbands, especially the newlyweds. The husband is at this point trying to establish standards, i.e., showing the wife what he likes and what he does not like." Similarly, in Qq Oltyr, Uzbekistan the researchers report that violence is said to be higher among young families.

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**Box 6.3 Reasons for Declines in Physical Violence against Women in Zambia**

- Men have been so weakened by hunger that they do not have the strength anymore to beat their wives.
- Husbands do not want to beat and antagonize the breadwinner because they will go hungry.
- The Victim Support Unit of the Zambia Police is very active in defending women's rights, especially those that have been beaten by their husbands and those whose property has been grabbed by the relatives of their deceased husbands.
- People have been sensitized to the problem by churches and NGOs.
Where Physical Violence Has Increased

Women must take care of everything and, to top it all off, get beaten up every night if he comes home drunk.
—A woman from Dimitrovgrad, Bulgaria

Eastern Europe and Central Asia stands out as the region with the largest increase in violence against women, 32 percent, and not a single case of declines in or absence of gender violence was reported. Sharp economic decline and accompanying stress, breakdown of state institutions and lack of support to women have led to dramatic increases in violence in homes. Discussion groups from the region speak of greater conflict in the household, with verbal abuse not only of women but also of men. The heightened conflict sometimes compounds men's frustrations and violence. In Plovdiv, Bulgaria, where discussion groups reported increased violence, one participant observed that people used to step in and break up fights when they heard "some noise" from their neighbors' homes, but "now nobody wants to interfere and there always are noise and quarrels anyway. It is quite normal now."

Much of the research details specific accounts of wife-battering. In a discussion group of men in Beiskeke, the Kyrgyz Republic one admitted that he beat his wife every now and then, but says it is her own fault. What's more, women from the group agreed with him: "We women start quarrels when there isn't enough food or clothes, and our husbands are very well aware of these problems themselves. They don't need our lecturing, so, when they ask us to stop and we don't, they may hit us a couple of times."

People also say that with the deterioration of the legal system in recent years, women's rights have eroded and women have less protection than they had in a communist society. According to a woman from a discussion group

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Box 6.4 Changing Portrayals and Role Reversals: Uzbekistan

At the beginning our life was good, but someone put the evil eye on us and everything started to go wrong. My father-in-law even threatened me with an ax, saying that my husband was a weakling, and my husband beat me after that. Just like that, with no reason. Times were hard for me then. In the morning I was supposed to bring my father-in-law warm water for his washbowl—neither too hot, nor too cold, and exactly at the right time. But I also had five children. So, I adjusted their feeding times so that it wouldn't interfere with my father-in-law's schedule. The poor kids cried, waiting for me to feed them. But at five in the morning I was expected to bring the warm water to my father-in-law. The chairman of the adilchot [rural citizen assembly] failed to understand my problem and did not support me. Now everything has quieted down because of the financial problems at home. It's me who is making money, and my husband cannot order me around.
in Kenesh, the Kyrgyz Republic where violence against women is reported to be increasing, "The state does not think about the women. The woman has to resolve her problems herself and it is very difficult to do now." A Bulgarian female attorney with a local practice in Varna told the researchers:

There is no law which defends the wife, child, or husband in cases of domestic violence. From the prosecutor's office they say, "This is not a problem of ours," while the police find an excuse in saying that they cannot interfere in family affairs.

Being afraid, the women refuse to sue the man who terrorizes them, while with Roma women this [filing complaints] is absolutely out of the question.

In Brazil women say that although they are becoming more proactive on violence, discussion groups in 6 of the 10 favelas visited report that violence against women continues to rise. There and elsewhere in the region women link this increase to alcohol and drug abuse stemming from greater male unemployment.

Where Violence Remains Widespread, but Trends Unclear

I cannot say that whether men beat their wives more in the war than now, but I personally know individuals who beat their wives when they come home drunk, and sometimes they beat the children. That is something that has always existed and always will.

—A young woman from Sekovici, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Violence remains widespread with unclear trends in 40 percent of the communities with regional variations. The distribution is as follows: 68 percent of these are in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 49 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 42 percent in Africa, and 40 percent in Asia. These figures include communities which report that violence is the same as before or that it exists, but they do not identify a trend. Some of the most extensive reports of violence against women come from Vietnam, but discussion groups there did not conduct a trend analysis. In a highland village of Lao Cai Province, a women's group estimates that 70 percent of husbands subjected their wives to regular physical violence, and a great deal of violence is also alluded to, especially by children, in other communities visited in the country. A woman in one community confides, "Lots of women in this neighborhood are beaten by their husbands. Lucky for me my brother lives nearby, so if my husband starts coming after me I run to my brother's house."

Parents, particularly in Latin America, also frequently mention the abusive behaviors and attitudes of children. In some cases, concerns are expressed about undue physical punishment of children as well as violence among siblings and children hitting their mothers and grandmothers. In Villa
Atamisqui, Argentina a discussion group of young women explains that “the role of the father in the house is to punish the children.” “The women also hit....” “The sons hit the mothers.” “The father teaches the children to hit their wives.” In Moreno, Argentina discussion groups spoke of terrible fighting in the home involving children, and they blame increased economic hardship and the harmful influences of alcohol and television.

The Opportunity and Challenge

To be able to pour your heart out to someone.... To know you have someone you can rely on.

—Participant, discussion group of men and women from Krasna Poliana, Bulgaria commenting on gender roles and responsibilities

In very many communities, traditional gender roles of men as providers and women as homemakers are changing, but the transition is proving difficult and highly uneven. With their roles uncertain, men and women express confusion and experience difficulty in establishing new interdependent partnerships. In Renggarasi, Indonesia women say they still turn to men to make decisions even though they have their own women's groups for support: “We are still in doubt to make decisions, afraid of making mistakes or wrong decisions.”

The findings about the linkages between decreased violence, women's increased economic roles and the benefits of supportive actions to reduce violence give hope. Activities that are specifically aimed at building awareness about gender inequities and improving gender relations have made a difference where they are available. In communities with NGOs that run gender awareness training and counseling programs, where safe houses and police protection exist, or where church members reach out to curb the violence, women speak of improvements in their lives. Without access to comparable support, men sometimes express resentment about so many resources targeted to women.

A particularly inspiring story comes from Leticia of Isla Trinitaria, Ecuador. During an interview with the researchers, Leticia credits a training program run by Habitat for changing her life. She shares that the gains are

...not only material...but also in knowing how to show love in my son and husband. This is happiness...now I am not a person who shouts and hits...now I talk and communicate...the best is when the father sits down with his son to have a conversation. Before, he [her husband] treated me badly, not physically but verbal abuse...now he respects me. He changed with me. Together we are changing. This is the result of the training...only because of the training.
When subsequently asked about what opportunities she sees, Leticia adds, "my opportunity is that I have free space, to decide for myself, no longer dependent on others. For me, this is a source of pride, my husband asking me [my advice]...now there isn't this machismo...there is mutual respect...together we decide."

To help reduce gender inequality and domestic conflict, there needs to be far greater attention to helping women and men in groups to work separately and together to come to terms with changing gender roles and identities.

Notes

1This chapter draws mainly on the findings from small group discussions of women and of men on changes in women's and men's responsibilities and decision-making in the household, as well as on changes in domestic violence against women. In some cases, the researchers reported very tense discussions. In one community in Ecuador, discussion groups of men and women were reduced to shouting at each other after findings were shared.

2We found only one exception to this phenomenon in the Muslim community of Jimowa, Nigeria. It was reported that Jimowa women traditionally used to go out to sell their milk products. However, about 12 years ago a man from the village attended a religious meeting outside the village and came back with the message that the women should remain indoors, in purdah. Since then women have not gone out to sell. While the elderly women can step out, even the girls in the village are encouraged to stay at home.

3The analysis on trends in gender violence is based on 163 community and provincial (in the case of Vietnam) reports. The topic was not addressed at all or was only discussed in vague terms in an additional 61 reports (19 of which are from Sri Lanka, where the topic of gender relations was not addressed). The category "violence reported but trend uncertain" refers to reports that mention the presence of physical violence such as beating, kicking, biting, battering, slapping, biting, etc., against women in the household, but do not provide information on perceptions of trends. In many reports discussion groups identify violence in the household in terms of fighting, quarrels, conflict, being ordered around, promiscuity, etc., however, these activities were not considered indications of physical violence for purposes of this analysis. Some communities reported that there was no domestic violence. In addition, a very small number of reports conclude that domestic violence in that community is "rare," "almost unheard of," or "not common," and these were added to the "violence rare or not present" category.

4However, this was not the case at the other sites in Bangladesh.
Chapter 7

Social Illbeing:
Left Out and Pushed Down

Summary

Social illbeing is the experience and feeling of being isolated, left out, looked down upon, alienated, pushed aside and ignored by the mainstream sociocultural and political processes. Social illbeing is one of the multiple dimensions of deprivation and disadvantages poor people face at the community and household levels. Social illbeing can be experienced both collectively and individually. This alienation seems to manifest itself as lack of access to resources, information, opportunities, power and mobility. It usually overlaps with economic deprivation and is sometimes determined by sociocultural factors (e.g., traditional social hierarchy, religion, ethnicity, color, and individual attributes and behavior that the community considers “deviant”). Often gender is an additional factor. Outside of Argentina and Brazil, many women feel they play a minimal role at the community level. Even where women are more active, they often feel that men retain positions of power and decisionmaking.

Social cohesion, another aspect of social wellbeing, is determined by unity within a community—exhibited by shared understanding, mutual support and reciprocity in relationships. Participants, in general, feel that social cohesion has declined in the past decade. However, economic stress and hardship seem to affect communities in two nearly opposite ways. As individuals and households struggle to make ends meet, they have little time for friends and neighbors, or for community activities and concerns, and many discussion groups report declining cohesion. At the same time, poor people come together to help one another overcome survival, safety and social problems.
Introduction

You grow in an environment full of diseases, violence, and drugs...You don't have the right to education, work, or leisure, and you are forced to "eat in the hands of the government"...so you are an easy prey for the rulers. You have to accept whatever they give you.

—A young woman, Padre Jordan, Brazil

Whether we are present in any of the occasions or not present, no one will take notice. When a poor man dies no one even cares to pay him condolences.

—A group of poor men, Fousa, Egypt

A researcher in Uzbekistan writes, "The socially excluded could be conceived of as encompassing all those strata deprived of opportunity." They are individuals, groups within communities, or entire communities. Ask them, and they will tell you they are shunned by mainstream culture and society. Participants in discussion groups voice three main dimensions of social illbeing:

- the process of alienation and isolation (social exclusion);
- strained social relations and diminishing social cohesion; and
- unequal gender relations at the community level.

Poor people understand their exclusion on a number of levels, cited as alienation from community events, from decisionmaking, from opportunity and from access to resources or to information. Certain forms of exclusion are based on social hierarchy and differentiation—the case of the lower-caste groups in India, Somaliland and Nigeria, or of indigenous populations and ethnic groups out of the mainstream sociopolitical domain, such as black people in Brazil and the Roma Gypsies in Bulgaria.

Poor people associate the word exclusion with groups that are despised, forgotten, ignored, feared, hated or discriminated against, and they can frequently identify elements of society more excluded than they.

The chapter begins by identifying the types of individuals who are excluded and reviews the various factors that are reported to trigger social exclusion. It then presents participants' reports of both diminishing and increasing social cohesion and the causes for these changes.

Who Is Excluded?

If his Bulgarian name is Angel or Ivan or Stoyan or Dragan, he'll get all the application forms and he asked to come in. As soon as he does and they realize he's a Gypsy, Roma, he's turned down, they drop their voices and tell him to come some other
time... if you decide to lodge a complaint they tell you, “Who do you think you are, what are you fighting for?” You might be slapped in the face so hard that they’ll send you flying through the door... What about those rights we’re supposed to have?

—Participant, discussion group of Roma men and women, Dimitrovgrad, Bulgaria

The types of people whom participants identify as excluded from opportunities, resources, decisionmaking and other social processes vary from context to context. The list in table 7.1 below includes a wide range of people and categories. Where these overlap the sense of isolation is intensified. There are variations to the list across communities within regions, and even within countries. For example, in urban areas in Jamaica people mention lack of tolerance for homosexuals, the elderly, those who are HIV-positive, political opponents and others. Yet those in rural communities feel responsible for members who cannot help themselves because of “madness and poverty.” However, they look down on “bad habits,” such as those of “coke heads” and “rum heads.”

**The Bottom Poor**

In Egypt they are called *madfoun*—the buried or buried alive; in Ghana, *ebahminbro*—the miserably poor, with no work, sick with no one to care for them; in Brazil, *miseraves*—the deprived; in Russia, *bonzhi*—the homeless; in Bangladesh, *ghirino gori*—the despised or hated poor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Types and categories of people excluded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>Raggaeckers, the hated poor, landless people, low castes, women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia</td>
<td>Ethnic minorities, migrant communities, drug addicts, poor, women, migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>The very poor, physically disabled (blind, epileptics, people with leprosy), demon possessed, mentally ill, adulterers, thieves, prostitutes, elderly, women, witches; lower-case class, internally displaced people, unmanned and dull-witted men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe and Central Asia</td>
<td>Very poor people, beggars, state pensioners, state enterprise workers, homeless, ethnic minorities, women, migrant communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>HIV sufferers, thieves, homosexuals, elderly, black communities, unemployed, people living in a particular locality or area known for high rates of crime and violence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Zambia participants describe the balandana sana or hapina in these terms: "lack food, eat once or twice, poor hygiene, flies all over them, cannot afford school and health costs, lead miserable lives, poor dirty clothing, poor sanitation, no access to water, look like mad people, live on vegetables and sweet potatoes." In Malawi the worst off are called osaukutisita: "They eat maize bran that is meant for pigs, mainly households headed by the aged, the sick, disabled, orphans, and widows." Some are described as oryentchera, the stunted poor, with thin bodies, short stature and thin hair, bodies that do not shine even after bathing, and who experience frequent illnesses and a severe lack of food. In all countries in Africa, participants estimate that these bottom poor have increased in the past decade.

Poor people can often identify others who are even worse off, even more left out, even more pushed down. These are likely to include those listed in the table above, as well as those who are disabled, orphaned, widowed, chronically sick, mentally unwell, stunted by deprivation, homeless or simply destitute. These poorest of the poor were only occasionally participants in the study, in the case of the ragpickers in Hyderabad, India, for example. The bottom poor, then, are seen by most participants as separate and different, and regarded with mixtures of pity, fear, disgust and even hatred.

The Basis of Social Exclusion

Participants identify a range of sometimes overlapping factors that contribute to social exclusion.

The Stigma of Poverty

I am far from the people who have money. The rich man closes his door in my face.

—A woman, Fowa, Egypt

The stigma of poverty, and the perception of deviant behavior associated with it, are recurring themes in discussions with poor people. In Brazil groups of poor people speak from bitter experience of being looked down upon or viewed with suspicion by the rest of the society simply because they are poor. Says a participant in a discussion group in Padre Jardana, Brazil, "When we go to hospitals we know we will have to wait beyond the expected time.... There comes somebody who is "higher" than us and jumps the queue without much fuss."

In Russia, "some participants noted that the old pensioners, the unemployed, and other poorest categories steadily approached the border that used to divide the homeless people from the rest of the community and society, and whose behavior was considered...antisocial (begging, stealing, eating from the trash)." In Dangara, Uzbekistan researchers find that "many people feel excluded from the community not because of their religious or ethnic background, but because of their poverty."
Children of poor households feel exclusion most poignantly. In Vietnam, the youth explain that “the poor children are looked down upon by others and have few friends. Children of rich families have many friends.” A 42-year-old unemployed and disabled woman from Uzbekistan laments that “the rich students are laughing at our children’s clothes.” In Kaoseng, Thailand a participant in a women’s discussion group commented that the rich “never look at the poor, never allow their children to associate with those of the poor.”

Poor people often also feel the stigma of poverty in their inability to exchange gifts and presents, thereby compelling them to avoid celebrations, festivities and other forms of social interaction. “I do not visit my friends anymore. If you go to visit them, you have to buy some presents, at least a packet of biscuits—and how could I afford them? And after that I have to invite them on my turn—how could I afford that?” asks a participant in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. Another man from Plovdiv explains,

Well, we are old and all of us started to claim that we do not drink alcohol anymore. Of course, I do drink alcohol, but a bottle of vodka [costs] 2,000 leva. So we do not serve alcohol. We started to meet together with our women over a can of homemade jam. The women always gather to try their new homemade jam, so we also started to integrate ourselves. We didn’t do that before.

In Foua, Egypt researchers note,

[Poverty] drives the poor to exclude themselves from the surrounding social networks. Indeed people stay interconnected if they maintain their neighbor and kinship relations. The maintenance of relations requires money. One of the metaphors used to illustrate this social exclusion is “There are houses that never open. People who are deprived or excluded do not have the material means to live with the rest of the population.”

Indebtedness means humiliation in Vietnam where people feel they cannot hold their heads up as they walk in the neighborhood. Moneylenders further exploit this humiliation, using it to extract payment from defaulting households. In one case, a woman was stripped naked and photographed, and her picture posted around the neighborhood. In Ghana the researchers write:

When one is socially excluded because of...poverty, reintegration is only possible when one regains wealth. Such is the lot of the poor! Whereas a criminal, like a rapist and others, can be reintegrated into society, the poor, whose situation is no
choice of his has no chance of ever being reintegrated into the community.

Lack of Money and Power

Social and economic factors reinforce each other in a cycle of alienation and powerlessness. Poverty deprives people of access to resources, to opportunities and to contact with those more influential. Without resources, opportunities and connections, economic mobility becomes exceedingly difficult.

In Kaoseng, Thailand a discussion group of poor youth say, "The poor are excluded from the community because they do not have the rights to borrow from the savings fund, no collateral," and "When there are loans, the rich are given, while the poor have no rights." Youth in Khwaalala, Malawi point out that poor people are denied access to credit facilities:

Most lending institutions, including informal moneylenders demand collateral which they cannot simply manage. The poor do not therefore have any prospects for social and economic mobility. Most of the loans are extended to well-to-do women who, to one degree or another, have political connections.

Young men in Dalshour, Egypt say employers place difficult conditions on employment eligibility such as requiring a university degree or living close to the workplace, which is difficult for them to meet.

Rural poor in the Kyrgyz Republic express concern that their children will not be able to seek higher education because of their inability to bear the expenses of the newly introduced paid education system. Discussion group participants in Borborema, Brazil ask, "How can the student study if the school requires a uniform that is too expensive...how can this student get better off in the society if he/she needs the school and he/she cannot get into it because he/she does not have a shoe?...If he/she buys the uniform, he/she cannot eat."

Many children in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam do not have their birth certificates because mothers abscond from the hospitals after delivery to avoid paying for the services. Without birth certificates, it is difficult to register children in school.

Lack of contacts and connections with influential people in high offices and positions of power also furthers the feeling of alienation and lack of opportunity among poor people. In Zawyet Sultan, Egypt a young man reports that "job opportunities are a lot but not for us. I applied for 10 jobs. The one who relies on nepotism is the one who works; the one who doesn’t they tell him to go home." Another man from the same community says, "One applies for a job, and if he doesn’t have a 6,000-pound bribe, he doesn’t get the job."
In Russia “power” is believed to rest with top officials, rich businessmen (with big money) or top policemen and mafiosi (who have armed support). The rest of the population feels distanced from power. Women there must struggle hard to get to the office with requests for help for their children or themselves, only to be badly insulted by male officials. In India many consider influence in government establishments and other high places within and outside the respective communities an important indicator of one’s status. In the opinion of a fisherwoman from Konada, India, “If you don’t know anyone, you will be thrown to the corner of a hospital.”

Participants in Malawi say that one needs to be “lucky” to have access to resources and services. What does lucky mean? “Being related to the people administering the activities or being very close to them, being a relative of the chief, being a patriot of the ruling party and being rich, such that it is easy to bribe the organizers.”

Lack of representation perpetuates social exclusion. A discussion group participant in Foua, Egypt says, “Nobody is able to communicate our problems.... Who represents us? Nobody.”

**Ethnic, Linguistic, Racial and Cultural Isolation**

Many times people despise you because of your color and many of them deny you a job when you tell them that you live here, and this is wrong.

—A young woman, Nova Califórnia, Brazil

Worldwide, discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, language and religion persists, compounding the isolation of whole communities of poor people. This is true for black people in Brazil, for Roma and Pomaks in Bulgaria, migrant Tajiks in Uzbekistan, indigenous people in Ecuador and minority communities in the northern uplands and the Mekong delta of Vietnam. Religious discrimination is described in the study affecting Hindus in Bangladesh and Protestants in Ethiopia’s Dibdibe Waju Peasant Association. Traditional social hierarchies exist, affecting lower castes in India, and lower-caste clans inSomaliland and southeast Nigeria. And even language can marginalize groups of people, such as the Khmer communities in Tra Vinh, Vietnam.

Hindus far outnumber their Muslim neighbors in parts of Gowainghat, Bangladesh but because they are a minority in the country, problems of discrimination touch them in myriad ways. The Hindu participants describe being alienated and discriminated against in development activities and flood relief provided by the government. When Muslims from other parts of the village encroach on Hindu property, Hindus cannot protest out of fear. Muslim boys tease Hindu girls, and Muslims pick quarrels with Hindus. In Dibdibe Waju, Ethiopia the predominantly Orthodox Christian community does not mix with the Protestants in the village.
Tajik refugees in the Kyrgyz Republic do not have passports and so cannot access health care services, employment or loans, and cannot vote in elections. In addition, they face hostility from the local people who say that “we had enough problems ourselves, and now you’re here to add to them.”

Problems of discrimination also extend to the classroom. A group of elderly Roma men report that teachers refuse to enroll Roma children in their classes so they don’t attend school.

In Ecuador an indigenous man complains that “teachers would also discriminate. They would say, ‘You are an ass; this is why you can’t.’ ‘You are an animal.’ Treating us badly in school is a form of discrimination.” In addition, parents in every region view non-native language education as a problem because they feel it affects their children’s education as well as their prospects. The indigenous people in Ecuador consider education and training (broadly defined) as high priorities for two reasons: first, “men and women without education cannot get good jobs,” and second, “men and women without education are an easy target for fraud by businesses.”

**Physical, Mental and Health Disabilities**

Those with disabilities become isolated because they often cannot attend and participate in community gatherings and activities. In Khwaja, Malawi all the participants mention that some people in the community are either marginalized or left out altogether, including those who are disabled or blind. They are considered “incapable of anything” and have nothing to offer. In Kračina Poliana, Bulgaria the research team finds that

...the disabled are invisible, confined to their homes, hidden from public view, left to cope alone with their problems; they are excluded from society because it demonstrates its alienation virtually everywhere—the high steps in public places, the absence of elevators, inconvenient transport, rutted roads, even polyclinics that have no conveniences for wheelchairs. For them the world is inaccessible.

Ill health also acts as a barrier to integration within the community in another way. People tend to keep away from those who have contagious diseases (or diseases perceived as contagious). People mention in particular: HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, fits and epilepsy, and leprosy. In Tabe Ese, Ghana a group of men say: “The first people to be excluded are those with fits or convulsions. The belief is that this disease is highly contagious and that a person with such a disease is necessarily a witch or wizard.” In urban areas of Jamaica the larger community keeps its distance from those infected with HIV.
Behaviors Outside Community Norms

Who will deal with those who dig in the trash and eat right from the waste bins? They are ill with tuberculosis. They are full of insects. They never wash themselves.

—A discussion group participant, Magadan, Russia

Certain behaviors—drug and alcohol addiction, homosexuality, criminal activities, immoral activities and just bad behavior—identify people as different from the rest of the community. Each society has its own behavioral norms, some explicit and others not so clear, and behavior elicits varying responses depending on the context. For instance, people in rural communities of Jamaica seem more tolerant of different behaviors than those in urban areas. Similarly, men and women in the same community may view alcoholics differently. What is typical across communities is that deviants from that community are excluded from the mainstream.

In Thompson Pen, Jamaica researchers report that those most left out of the decision-making process are beggars, thieves and those with HIV/AIDS:

This group of persons is believed to be a danger to themselves and others because of the stigma associated with their sexual orientation or bad fortune. It is firmly believed by all groups of women that if the beggars and thieves change their lifestyle, it is possible that they can be re-integrated into the community.

In Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam households with drug addicts are often avoided by other households and stigmatized as being involved in “social evils.”

Area Stigma

One day I was called to work for a company... when they saw that I lived in Bode, they didn’t call me because they thought I was one of those marginals (rogues or street thugs)... they didn’t trust me.

—A resident of Bode, Brazil

Not only are people in remote areas isolated from services and opportunities, but they are often shunned as well by virtue of their addresses. In some areas, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, entire communities of poor people are stigmatized by society’s general perception of their neighborhood as a ghetto or one where violence and crime prevail. “Employers refuse to hire residents of favelas, particularly of the poorest ones that have a record of violence,” say participants in Brazil. Residents of favelas give false addresses and show borrowed electricity and water bills from friends with...
better addresses to their prospective employers. A woman from Sacadura Cabral says that her husband never gives his address to his colleagues “because of sheer shame.”

The Roma in Bulgaria, who are physically isolated and dwell in segregated spaces within the communities in which they live, exclaim, “We’re excluded as if we were lepers; we’ve been left here to die.”

**Self-Exclusion**

We are social outcasts...we are like refuse, like animals. Like a rubbish bin.

—Homeless people in Sofia, Bulgaria

In Vietnam researchers report that when village leaders cannot speak or write Vietnamese well, it constrains the flow of information down to households. Similarly, the community’s ability to represent itself at a higher level with decisionmakers is also constrained: “The effect is to make the whole community more introspective and introverted so they partly self-exclude themselves from wider society. The Khmer communities in Tra Vinh...reported feeling vulnerable when trading or going to market because of their linguistic disadvantages and lower literacy skills. They felt they had no way of knowing if they were being cheated.”

Humiliated because of their poverty—which often is exacerbated by neglect from other community members—poor people feel inferior and ashamed of their situation. Even when the rest of the community does not actively exclude them, they may choose to cease mixing with other people. Poor people often perceive a distance between themselves and the better off.

In Tra Vinh, Vietnam poorer households feel looked down on by wealthier households, as exemplified by the case of one poor farmer who “went to buy some la [a kind of leaf] and the owner asked me how I could have the money to buy this. I felt very ashamed and didn’t go back again.”

Young women in Kened, Kyrgyz Republic also exhibit low levels of self-esteem when they ask, “Who needs our opinion? Who is going to listen to us?”

**The Exclusion of Women**

When a woman gives her opinion, they [men] make fun of her and don’t pay attention.... If women go to a meeting, they don’t give their opinion.

—A woman, Las Pascuas, Bolivia

A poor woman is...doubly voiceless due to her gender and social status.... Community decisions are the rights and responsibilities of menfolk. Women’s role is only to accept and implement them.

—Research team, Indonesia
The spectrum of changes in gender roles witnessed at the household level (see chapter 6) is not repeated to the same extent at the community level. Women in many of the study communities are less seen and heard in public spaces than are men. Women do take part in some community activities, but often as an extension of their traditional “female” roles (i.e., they cook, clean, decorate, fetch water). Especially disturbing are reports from the former Soviet bloc countries that women feel more invisible now than they did a decade ago. In Asia and Latin America, however, there are signs of women playing a more active role in community affairs.

Even in communities where women are now far more involved in their household decision-making processes, they are marginalized or themselves keep away from community-level decisions. Some women and men feel that community decisions are male territory and, thus, out of bounds for the women. Other women express a clear lack of time and energy to be involved in community issues.

The Indonesian researchers indicate that while formal decision-making processes are an established part of community life, the “Community” normally means just the men:

Women's groups everywhere confirm that women are neither invited nor expected to attend village meetings, which are often conducted at male-only events and places such as the Friday post-prayer meeting at the mosque or Balai Desa [village forum]. In Java women have their own community gatherings and activities in PKK [Family Welfare Movement for women] meetings, Posyandu [primary health care], and saving and credit groups [Krisan]. These are, however, for implementing development programs or self-help initiatives, with little community decision-making elements. While some of them may attend the general village meetings, women's expected role is generally that of silent observers or servers of tea and refreshments.

There are some variations within communities where better-off groups of women may feel less alienated than other groups of women in the same community. On the Nias Tenggara islands in Indonesia, for instance, some better-off women may have some voice, but poorer women have “no right to speak” at community gatherings: “If poor women protest, their voice will not be heard, or even worse, they would be chastised for speaking in public.”

In communities with high levels of male migration, women sometimes step in and assume leadership roles by default. Such behavior was mentioned in some of the rural sites from Ecuador and Thailand, for instance.

In South Asia women who were traditionally homebound and not visible in the community are now more active among women's groups supported by NGOs. As a result, there is evidence of increased awareness and confidence
among the women. However, as in Indonesia, their participation at the community level appears to be limited to attending meetings and activities organized by the women's groups.

There are some countries, such as Bangladesh, Jamaica and Malawi, where women in a number of communities perceive a marginal improvement in their role at the community level and where they sometimes are included in decisions regarding development activities. According to researchers in Malawi,

Most of the groups agreed that women now make inputs into community-level decisions. Ten years ago, they did not have any voice... For example, women today can decide on where to locate a clean water point. They can even have a say on where to build a new health facility. The changes have come about because of the change in the political system...[because] a good number of women are enlightened and empowered.

The leadership of women in community affairs is perhaps most pronounced in Latin America and the Caribbean countries (except in Bolivia, where the situation seems to have changed little). There many women enjoy access to women's organizations and other NGOs and have organized a myriad of collective activities and campaigns for better community services and infrastructure. According to a participant in a discussion group of married women in Florencio Varela, Argentina, "I go to school meetings and I see women, I go to church meetings and I see women, I go to Plan Vida meetings and I see women.... Anyone know where the men are?" At the final question women began laughing. In fact, and as is indicated in box 7.1,
in several communities in the region it is felt that women participate more than the men at the community level. In a number of cases, however, discussion groups indicate that men often continue to exercise power over major community decisions.

Women in Eastern European and Central Asian countries seem to be at the other end of the spectrum, as they have seen a decline in their involvement in community activities and decisionmaking over the last decade with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the economic crisis that followed. In explaining their growing alienation, women speak of shouldering increasing work burdens and also mention declining public support for women’s participation in community affairs. In Kenesh, Kyrgyz Republic an elderly woman reports, “Before the collective farm meetings without us would not be valid. We had the right to express our views and participate in taking a decision concerning the village life. And now no one even listens to us.” The women in Kenesh express concern over distancing themselves from community affairs while some men say that it was never any of the women’s business anyway.

Changes in Social Cohesion

There was a fire on our street one month ago. Somebody put my neighbor’s barn on fire... The neighbors started to shout “fire, fire.” I ran with a bucket and saw just five or six people hurrying. At the end there were no more than a dozen of us. The rest of the neighbors stayed at their homes and did not intervene... Ten years ago the whole street would have been there in five minutes.

—a middle-aged woman, Razgrad, Bulgaria

Poor people describe social cohesion as unity within a community where there is shared understanding, mutual support and reciprocity in relationships (see box 7.2). In Brazil the researchers note,

The poor define social cohesion in complex ways. Sometimes it is articulated as solidarity and patterns of reciprocity in social interaction. In many instances, it is associated with a sense of belonging to the community. This sense is not the result of social cohesion but, rather, the recognition of equality in poverty conditions and their past or current situation as squatters.

Social cohesion is also often described in terms of coming together in informal and formal groups, often to solve community problems. Typically, these institutions are strictly local, either rooted in tradition or involving relatively small groups in face-to-face relationships. Where social relations are under stress, local organizations often suffer. Many discussion groups in the study indicate that levels of community bonds and action are declin-
ing, and they associate this trend with rising economic hardship. At the other end of the spectrum, however, and sometimes even within the same communities, a seemingly contradictory pattern of change is reported: hardship also catalyzes social ties and drives people and their communities closer together in their struggle for survival.

**Box 7.2 Poor People's Definitions of Social Cohesion**

In the Kyrgyz Republic researchers note, “Social cohesion is understood... as a possibility to resolve problems of the community by a joint effort of all community members, and as unity and friendship between people of different ethnic backgrounds.” In Jamaica, the definition of social cohesion includes “unity, togetherness, no political war, understand each other, share experiences and show respect.”

In Togdheer, Somaliland participants define social cohesion as “supporting each other during hard times, having common community leadership, extending a helping hand to most unfortunate members of the community and solving problems together in a cooperative and peaceful manner.” Older people there think social cohesion exists both during conflict as well as peaceful times, since pastoral groups need to get together in their kinship or clan systems to face the harsh nomadic pastoral environment.

Social cohesion for the residents of Kurkura Dembi, Ethiopia means “sharing ideas, helping each other, praying together, sharing the good and the bad together, sing together at marriages and cry together at funerals.”

In Dukersfield, Jamaica social cohesion is defined in terms of “togetherness” or “unity within the community.” Clubs and small groups that get together according to age and gender are mentioned as examples. They include “eld man parks,” “middle class club” and places where the youth meet—“round the corner” and the “tong wall.”

Men in Temeke, Ghana describe social cohesion in terms of how well different groups in the community come together to build a classroom for the local school or to weed along the roads, as well as contributing money to buy or brew beer and to prepare meals at funerals. The local word they use is woman, which means unity and togetherness.

**Strained Social Relations and Reduced Collective Action**

No one helps anyone; the hungry lives for himself, and the satiated lives for himself.

—A resident, Zawyet Sultan, Egypt

When food was in abundance, relatives used to share it. In these days of hunger not even relatives would help you by giving you some food.

—A young man, Nchinishi, Zambia
In discussions about changes in social cohesion in their communities, many participants mention that economic stress and poverty frequently make people more self-centered and individualistic as they try to cope with their survival. “Now everyone is boiling in their own broth [they have their own problems]; there is no time to think about the society,” suggests a young man from Ketae, Kyrgyz Republic. In explaining the lack of community activism in Padre Jordano, Brazil a man shares, “Life for us is so difficult that there is no time left to think about these things...sometimes there comes someone who says, ‘Folks, we need to unite ourselves,’ and later he disappears.” People in Khwala, Malawi describe disintegrating kinship ties. With declines in food production, relatives hide food and pretend to have run short of supplies so that they don’t have to share their food with the more needy relatives. This creates resentment and tension.

In Africa the scourge of HIV/AIDS is breaking up not just communities but families as well, as the disease drains limited resources and the stigma tears them apart. In discussing the impact of HIV/AIDS, discussion groups in Malawi and Zambia highlight the strain of caring for the orphaned. A group of women reflecting on HIV/AIDS from Londa, Zambia mention that the elderly are also greatly affected, because they are the ones left with the orphans while the “able-bodied women and men are dying.”

The difficult political and economic transitions in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, say many participants there, have resulted in significant declines in social cohesion. According to a middle-aged woman from Ak Kiya, Kyrgyz Republic, “There is no unity in our community. We don’t visit each other. In the past, we used to help, pool money if somebody had a death in the family. We no longer do. How can people help others if they don’t have enough for themselves?” says a participant in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, “One of the main consequences of poverty is becoming like strangers to each other.”

In Bosnia and Herzegovina the devastation of the war and slow recovery have greatly strained local support systems. “No one helps, not anyone,” says an older woman of Vares, “I would gladly help someone, but how, when I am in need of help myself. This is misery. Our souls, our psyches are dead. We do not experience any help from our neighbors. If you seek help from your neighbor, he can’t help in any case, and they won’t because everyone is just feeding or grabbing for themselves.” Or this from a resident of Sarajevo, “People don’t organize themselves. They don’t care about other people. If someone gets a donation, they keep their mouths closed.... Before the war, people cared. There were the trade unions and firms, and now there is no one to help.”

Poverty of time, political indifference and lack of unity present further obstacles to organizing at the local level. Rewards are uncertain, and risks many. When probed by researchers on possibilities of organizing, a group of weavers in Fura, Egypt say, “We as handicraftsmen cannot agree with one another. We cannot find food, and we look for work.” Similarly, a woman in a discussion group in Esmeraldas, Ecuador commented that unity within the community is needed before they can approach the
municipality to get support. The rest of the discussion group looked on with very long faces, as if the woman had said the worst possible thing, or something that was impossible.

**What Brings People Together?**

Paradoxically, discussion groups in quite varying contexts highlight that hardship can also galvanize people and draw them closer together. This seems to be the case especially among family and kin. “Even if you are on bad terms with your relatives, you always know that if you are in real need, they will help you,” says a participant of Kalaidzhi, Bulgaria. People in most every context view the family as a dependable source of support on which they could always rely during a crisis. Poor people turn to extended families for loans, food and sometimes contacts for jobs or funds for health emergencies. In Malawi people cite grandparents for providing moral and social values and advice, especially among the youth.

Beyond the immediate and extended family poor people also turn to friends, neighbors and a diverse range of local groups. Through these networks, poor people highlight countless examples of helping each other to overcome survival, safety and social problems: a neighborhood watch in the Zambian farming village of Kabemba works to deter theft; a library provides after-school care for children in Duckensfield, Jamaica; women members of an NGO in Madaripur, Bangladesh raised Tk 50,000 from local villagers to help a couple with their daughter’s marriage, which was being postponed because of the demands for dowry.

Death, devastation and other stresses perhaps most frequently trigger community action. In Mbwadzulu, Malawi a discussion group of men and women explain,

> Whenever there is a funeral, we work together...women draw water, collect firewood, and collect maize flour from well-wishers...while the men dig the grave and bury the dead.... We work together on community projects like molding bricks for a school project.... Women also work together when cleaning around the boreholes.

In Borg Meghezel, Egypt a poor man describes how an accident brought our community cohesion in sharing the grief:

> Some time ago we had a major accident when one of the boats disappeared with all its crew; none of them returned. For a whole year we refused to have any wedding, to turn on any television or radio, or to have any kind of celebration, so as to express our mourning to those who disappeared.
In the village of Pegambiran, Indonesia neighbors regularly share corn, peanuts and cassava among needier families. In Foua, Egypt the researchers found few groups where poor people could turn in times of crisis. Some mention taking their case to the imam of the mosque. They go to him on Fridays, the day of the week set aside for congregational prayer, and a handkerchief for donations is placed at the mosque's entrance.

Social cohesion sometimes exists among people performing the same type of work. For example, in El Mataria, Egypt discussion group participants report, "Whenever there is a crisis, the fishermen help each other by collecting money for the person needing help." Similarly in Mbwardulu, Malawi villagers say, "At times when a person is in trouble in the middle of the lake, for example, his lamp has run out of kerosene or he has lost his paddle...when he shouts for help, we always go to assist."

**The Opportunity and Challenge**

We live together, and when there is something we need to discuss together, we gather here as we have done now.

—Discussion group participants, Mbwardulu, Malawi

Participants in Kajima, Ethiopia indicate several organizations that bring them together for religious, social and financial needs. The researchers note, "These are all informal local institutions that, this way or another, bring the people together. They have contributed a great deal to bring about social cohesion among the people in the community." Any potential conflict, including among individuals, is resolved by the elderly of the community.

So often poor people's support systems go unrecognized. Their informality and diversity makes them both easy and tempting for public officials and NGOs to disregard. Although local actors and groups provide vital resources in the daily lives of poor people, on their own these networks are unlikely to propel people out of poverty. As a poor woman from Achy, Kyrgyz Republic acknowledges, "If I borrow 5 kilograms of flour from a neighbor, I will have bread for two days. On the third or fourth day I'll have to return the flour." When stressed, these vital bonds can break down, leaving poor women and men even more vulnerable and isolated.

Poor people's networks are fragile. The biggest challenge for development is to build on these. In the case of support for poor women and other excluded groups, NGOs appear to have an important role. Although few, there are some success stories of NGOs working with particular excluded groups—rappickers, the disabled, and, in India, scheduled castes (the lowest of the four castes) and tribes, sex workers and orphans—helping them assert their rights and gain status and acceptance in society, and self-respect.
Notes

Small groups discussed issues related to social cohesion and social exclusion; usually after the participants had analyzed wellbeing and illbeing. Researchers first asked participants to provide their own criteria for analyzing wellbeing. If these included social exclusion and cohesion, participants were asked to elaborate and give examples. However, in cases where the group did not mention these, the facilitators introduced these issues by asking specific questions, such as: Are some people or groups left out of society, or looked down upon or excluded from active participation in community life or decision-making? Who gets left out and on what basis? What is the impact of such exclusion? Is it possible for those excluded ever to become included? How do people define social cohesion? Is there more or less social unity and sense of belonging than before? Why? Is there more or less crime and conflict than in the past, or has it stayed at the same level? Why? Are there tensions or conflicts among groups in the community? Which groups? Why? Have intergroup conflicts increased or decreased? Why? How? Researchers also asked participants to analyze whether they have seen any changes in gender roles and relations at the community level.
Chapter 8

Anxiety, Fear and Insecurities

Summary

Poor people repeatedly stress the anxiety and fear they experience because they feel insecure and vulnerable. Most say they feel less secure and more vulnerable today than in previous times. They describe security as stability and continuity of livelihood, predictability of relationships, feeling safe and belonging to a social group. Forms and degrees of security and insecurity vary by region and differ by gender. Women are vulnerable to abuse and violence in the home, when widowed, and in the workplace. Men, particularly young men, are more likely to be picked up by the police.

The origins and nature of insecurities are related to types of threat, shock and stress. People most frequently mention the following:

- Insecurities of work and livelihood.
- Natural and human-made disasters.
- Crime and violence.
- Persecution by the police and lack of justice.
- Civil conflict and war.
- Macropolicy shocks and stresses.
- Social vulnerability.
- Health, illness and death.

Insecurities and mishaps are an integral and pervasive part of the illbeing of the poor, threatening them and making them anxious, fearful and miserable. Preventing and mitigating shocks benefit the poor. The practical question is: To achieve security for the poor as a base for material improvement, social wellbeing, and peace of mind, what and who has to change?
Introduction

Everyday I am afraid of the next.
—A youth, Ekaterinburg, Russia

Where there is no security, there is no life.
—A man, Dagaar, Somaliland

With only a few exceptions, notably in some isolated communities, poor people report feeling less secure and more fearful than they did 10 years earlier. The chapter begins with poor people’s definitions of security. Regional trends and some gender differences are then highlighted. This leads into a typology of shocks and stresses. The chapter concludes with some reflections.

What Does Security Mean to Poor People?

Security is peace of mind and the possibility to sleep relaxed.
—A woman, El Gawab, Egypt

To be well is to know what will happen with me tomorrow.
—Middle-aged man, Razgrad, Bulgaria

The term security seems to describe one of poor people’s major concerns. In general, security implies stability and continuity. Vulnerability implies the inability to cope with shock or misfortune. Increases in insecurity and vulnerability result in pervasive anxiety and fear. For poor people, security has many local meanings. Based on the views of a range of groups in Krasna Poliana, Bulgaria, security has four dimensions: stability of income, predictability of one’s daily life, protection from crime and psychological security.

Financial security means a stable and steady income. Pensioners say, “There is security, stability when you have a job and stable pay...before 10 November 1989 life was better; there was greater security because the prices of foods and medicines were low and stable.” Or in the words of a young person from Sofia, “Jobs provide security; if there are jobs there’ll also be support for the elderly and large families.” Young people in Bulgaria say, “There was greater security before, higher incomes, more work. People are now afraid, especially older people. Ultimately security is measured in terms of money; it all boils down to money.”

The second type of security—predictability of daily life—is prominent in descriptions by the Roma people. They worry more about unpredictability than income security. A community report from Bulgaria says that Roma men describe security as knowing “what to expect.”
The third type of security—protection from crime—is linked to feeling safe. Insecurity arises from lack of law and order and increased crime. A group of men and women in Krasno Poliany say,

People are afraid in general. Of crime, of going home alone late at night. Large-scale drug addiction and prostitution have also become a threat. To feel safer, people now have iron bars installed on their windows and doors; there should be tougher laws and coordination among authorities.

The fourth meaning of security—psychological security—focuses on the emotional, psychological sense of belonging to a social group. A group of men and women explain, "You have a sense of security when you are free and loved by your close ones." The youth raise both practical anxieties and more existential ones: "How could you feel secure when you are a mere mortal and could die suddenly? I am insecure, but I don't think I will be surprised by anything."

The complexity and multiple dimensions of security can also be seen in rural Ghana. In Adahoye men define security to mean protection against all forms of harm from both physical and spiritual forces. Security includes having property that can be sold in times of need, but it also includes having a "soul guardian," to protect a person. It entails making sacrifices to shrines and ancestors, possessing bangles and rings that have magical powers, owning livestock, having NGOs or governments construct irrigation dams, having direct roads to markets, forming youth action groups, having children who support aging parents, having many wives or children, having a stable job and having enough to eat.

Although poor people see the conventional understanding of insecurity and vulnerability as important, in the study a strong psychological dimension emerges. Not knowing, a lack of control, and inability to take defensive action emerge as important factors in various ways. A participant in a discussion group in El Mataria, Egypt says, "Vulnerability is something that we do not know and we cannot face or anticipate. It is also the thing that we know is going to happen but at the same time we are unable to face." In the same community in Egypt people describe weakness and vulnerability as the inability to face others due to the difference in physical power and material wealth: "Even if I am not harming anyone, people will still harm me because I am weak." In northern Ghana women define insecurity as a series of risks, including sickness, death, hunger, fear, theft and possible destruction of crops by monkeys. Throughout these and other discussions across regions, anxiety emerges as the defining characteristic of insecurity, and the anxiety is based not on one but on many risks and fears: anxiety about jobs, anxiety about not getting paid, anxiety about needing to migrate, anxiety about lack of protection and safety, anxiety about floods and drought, anxiety about shelter, anxiety
about falling ill, and anxiety about the future of children and settling them
well in marriage.

People are also anxious about declining family, community and charita-
table support. A poor person in Dahshour, Egypt notes that “the poor person
who gets help is even more vulnerable, because the day may come when
the charitable person may stop helping. Then what would become of him? He
expects this to happen and worries about it.”

Trends and Patterns

Before, thieves wouldn’t rob in their own neighborhood.
Before, your neighbor wouldn’t rob you. Now the rules have
changed.

—Participant, discussion group of men and women,
La Matanza, Argentina

Poor people across countries report a decline in security, but there are
some regional and gender differences. Although reasons vary, increases
in insecurity come from multiple causes that feed into one another, making
it difficult for the poor to escape spiraling insecurity.

Regional Trends in Security

Poor people report a decrease in security over the last 10 years in every re-

region, though the reasons vary. In Africa they are closely related to basic agri-
culture and survival that depend on the vagaries of nature, rains, droughts,
etc. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, people see the collapse of the state
and the switch to market economies as the central reason for increased
insecurity. In South Asia, both in India and Bangladesh, lack of land, land-
related issues, and natural disasters—both floods and droughts—dominate in
rural areas. In urban areas, people feel insecure because they may be evicted.
In East Asia, people cite the economic crisis, loss of jobs, and tight markets
for those who are self-employed. In the Latin American and Caribbean coun-
tries, people point to lack of safety, crime and lack of economic opportun-
ities as key reasons for increased insecurity. In urban areas poor people also
mention greater environmental vulnerability.

Gender Differences

Women in many countries feel their security is linked to the fate of their hus-
bands. Men are more likely to associate insecurity with events outside the
household that affect income, such as unemployment, natural disasters, in-
creasing crime and lack of social and external support.

In Bangladesh in the study communities, security for women means hav-
ing a male earner in the household, a son to every mother, and a monoga-
mous husband. Older women say it means sons should not sever ties with
their mothers after the sons get married. Women’s definitions of security in some places include being financially well off, being able to provide for children, being able to provide meals for the family and having a house. In many areas women also mention respect as well as freedom from fear of robbery. Men describe security in terms of access to cultivable land, health, and employment.

In Kajima, Ethiopia women in rural areas say that because their physical mobility is more limited than that of men, they are more dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods and hence are more insecure. In the Kyrgyz Republic a 21-year-old woman says that a single woman living in a dormitory “may be humiliated, insulted, and sexually harassed by local men who know that the woman has no husband to protect her.” This woman had left her husband because he drank to excess and beat her.

Although both poor men and women are forced to look for jobs, credit and assistance, women and men both report that women face special vulnerability. In many contexts, women must face the humiliation of sexual abuses. In Brazil and Jamaica, women report feeling vulnerable to sexual assault and rape. In Bangladesh, insecurity for women includes abduction and being forced to spend the night with the abductor and being returned the next day, being “teased” on the road by men, and being victims of acid-throwing incidents. For their part, men feel more insecure because of their greater likelihood of being picked up by the police. In Brazil, Jamaica and Russia young men feel vulnerable to police harassment and brutality. A poor youth in Dzerzhinsk, Russia said he had been detained on false accusations by the police and was kept in a cold cell to the end of the month so the police could fulfill their quota. Young people feel that, instead of catching real criminals, the police target youth because they are easy to apprehend.

In Uzbekistan, people say it is common practice for the police and customs officials to insert drugs in the belongings of migrants trying to take part in cross-border trade in consumer goods with neighboring Kyrgyz Republic. To avoid prosecution, the Uzbek men then have to leave behind a large portion of their goods. It is precisely because of men’s higher risk of conflict with Kyrgyz police that women are now more active in this trade.

Types of Insecurity

On the basis of poor people’s descriptions, types of insecurity can be broadly linked to the following factors:

- Survival and livelihoods.
- Natural disasters.
- Crime and violence.
- Persecution by police and lack of justice.
- Civil conflict and war.
- Macroeconomic shocks and stresses.
- Social vulnerability.
- Health, illness and death.
Survival and Livelihoods

As if land shortage is not bad enough we live a life of tension worrying about the rain: will it rain or not? There is nothing about which we say, “this is for tomorrow.” We live hour to hour.

—A woman, Kajima, Ethiopia

You can’t be sure that when you do a job, you’ll get paid for it.
—An older woman, Dimitrovgrad, Bulgaria

Today, we’re fine; tomorrow they will throw us out.
—A poor woman from a squatter settlement in Isla Trinitaria, Ecuador

Poor people speak of anxieties about sheer survival, hunger and the search for food and shelter. They express many concerns about insecurities of work and sources of livelihood. In rural areas the focus is on agriculture, natural resources and limited options. In urban areas the main focus is on employment and illegality.

Rural: Uncertain Returns to Farming

Rainfall is erratic and unreliable. Sometimes it is too much, and sometimes it is just not there. There are also many pests. To make things worse, our farmland is continuously decreasing as a result of concessions given to poultry farms by private investors.

—A group of poor men and women, Kajima, Ethiopia

In rural areas, poor people worry about the climatic and other insecurities of agriculture. Ethiopia provides many examples of climatic stress with uncertain rains combining with other factors, including destruction of houses.

In Kajima, Ethiopia women characterize poverty as the state of “dying while seated” or when “water becomes a big thing.” The main factor for this state of affairs in their community, women say, is their dependency on the rains: “Sometimes it doesn’t rain when it should and there is no harvest, or the pests eat up the crops and there isn’t much we can do. All people here suffer equally since this is God’s will and there is no poor or rich, all are equally exposed.” These poor Ethiopian women see no escape from their precarious existence, or from having to fall back on other means of livelihood: “As long as our soul has not parted from our body, we will make a living selling cow dung.”

In Bolivia poor farmers in Horencio talk about their fears of environmental vulnerability. They speak of changes in climate and weather patterns that make farming that is dependent on rainfall insecure and highly risky. “Before it rained in its season; now there are changes in time and climate; it
doesn’t rain when it has the chance. Some have production and some don’t.”

“Diseases in crops and livestock cause losses and worry.” People speak about notable deterioration in the land because of unpredictable weather and about increases in crop and livestock diseases for which new technical knowledge is required. To cope, they have attempted to diversify and combine rural activities with work in the city.

**Urban: Insecure Work, No Bargaining Power**

*Risk is the acceptance of endangering one’s honor, or safety or future, in order to earn an income or to cover immediate expenses.*

—Poor man, Balsa, Egypt

Insecure casual labor is widespread in urban and rural areas. Salaried employment even at low wages is prized for its security above irregular higher-paying jobs. In Dimitrovgrad, Bulgaria youth say, “Security means to know that you have a regular job and regular pay, to live more or less decently.”

Those searching for jobs suffer the frustrations of powerlessness. Being denied information adds to their humiliation. A poor man in Plovdiv, Bulgaria describes his job hunting:

*The first thing I do everyday is to buy the Maritza [local newspaper] and look at the announcements. Then I go from one employer to another looking for a job. And usually they say no, without any explanation. The employer can keep you up to three months on a temporary contract without signing a permanent contract. At the end of the third month he just says “Go away,” without explaining how and why. Just “Go away.” He could send you away even earlier if he did not like you. If you say anything, if you cross him, he says, “Go away, there are thousands like you waiting for your position.”*

Employment in the private sector, even when obtained, is insecure. Poor participants speak about their vulnerability and lack of recourse against the injustices of employers. In Mohammadpur, Bangladesh garment workers can lose their jobs because of any irregularity. Men also report that a garment factory owner refused to pay overtime compensation to workers for losses incurred during strikes, when owners closed factories to keep them safe from terrorist attacks. In Russia people feel the working class is no longer protected because there are no trade unions: “They force you to quit your job, but they wouldn’t lay you off themselves, because then they would have to pay you severance [benefits]. It makes no sense to go to court. Workers are a class not protected anymore.” They contrast their predicament with the past: “We didn’t have to worry before; everybody had some savings. At work we had special money pools....” But now their insecurity and worry are heightened because they have no savings to fall back on.
In the urban casual labor market, poor people find themselves in a weak bargaining position. In Bangladesh poor men in Mohammadpur say they cannot protest when they receive lower wages than agreed upon because plenty of others are waiting for the few jobs there are. Rickshaw pullers lose their rickshaws when they are late in payment. In fishing communities in Borg Meghezel, Egypt, those who are most dependent on whether the boat owner needs extra cheap labor on their boats feel the most insecure: “Everyday we do not know whether we are going to eat or not.”

In Bolivia the urban poor say they constantly search for jobs and that, in the end, there is always the chance they will not be paid. An elderly man in Esmeraldas, Ecuador says, “There is no work there [in the countryside], nothing, and if you go to work they don’t pay you. I went to get paid up there...nothing...not even half—in any case the life you lead is bad, because you work and don’t get paid. That’s how life is.”

The poor often take dangerous jobs. In the village of Borg Meghezel fishermen tell of the risks of being out in the seas. Everyday they say, “We are working while carrying our lives between our hands.” In La Matanza, Argentina a discussion group of men spoke of their community giving up hope. They observed that young people drop out of school saying, “If the adults are unemployed, why should I live?” One of the men in the group went on to comment that “before, in my father’s time you were without work for one week, a week without work; today years go by when you don’t have work; the only alternative is to die.”

Natural and Human-Made Disasters

The biggest shock we ever had was Hurricane Gilbert: the shock was because all that we found after Gilbert was one wooden chair.

—A woman, Millbank, Jamaica

The atmosphere is not rewarding us; lately the climate has been adverse.

—A poor male farmer, Río La Sal, Bolivia

Many poor people link insecurity to natural disasters and dangers and to degraded and polluted environments. Poor people often live and work precisely where these hazards prevail and combine. And in Jamaica, a country subject to hurricanes, the community report summarizes security for fishermen in Little Bay as “the ability of persons to cope with disasters.”

People mention many natural disasters and dangers, including landslides, floods, high winds and hurricanes, riverbank erosion, fires, and wild animals. Some disasters can be quite localized, such as one or a few houses burning down. In Achi, Kyrgyz Republic people speak of a landslide in 1994 that buried several houses and a big barn in the soil and killed some villagers.
Hippopotamuses destroyed crops in Mbwadulu in Malawi. In Bangladesh and Ecuador poor people speak about the devastation from floods.

The dangers of storms and winds stand out. In the village of Borg Meghezel in Egypt, the risk of typhoons prevents fishing in the winter. More dramatically, very high winds leave lasting damage. In Little Bay, Jamaica villagers talk about houses destroyed 11 years earlier by Hurricane Gilbert that have never been repaired or replaced. Fishermen there have also been unable to replace the fish pots they lost in Hurricane Mitch.

In urban shanties, fire is a special danger. Fire can consume everything, leaving people destitute. A Vietnamese couple in Lao Cai, Vietnam say, “Everything was in the fire, even the chopsticks.” In Battala slum in Mohammadpur, Bangladesh a fire lasting for two days in February 1998 left almost all houses and shops burned except for a few brick ones; the fire was followed by outbreaks of diarrhea, fever and pneumonia. For Ali Akbar, “all belongings were burnt to ashes” in that fire. NGOs and local authorities provided satisfactory levels of relief, but people are still afraid as a result of the fire.

Natural and human-made disasters affect all households, but poor people report limited ability to recover. In rural areas in Vietnam the poor spoke about the difficulties in recovering from natural disaster, floods, drought, storms, pests, or animal death due to disease. They said that those with capital have a buffer and are better able to survive and recover, whereas poorer households without capital reserves go under with even the smallest shock.

**Crime and Violence**

_I do not know who to trust, the police or the criminals. Our public safety is ourselves. We work and hide indoors...and of dangers at school...I am afraid that they might kill my son for something as irrelevant as a snack._

—From a women’s group, Sacadura Cabral, Brazil

_Violence is a chain: the man beats the woman, the woman takes it out on the children, and the children are violent even with the animals._

—A youth, Barrio Universitarios, Bolivia

To one degree or another, poor people speak of declining public safety as an element of increasing insecurity in almost every country, in both rural and urban areas. People mention it least in India and most often in Brazil and Russia. Increasing crime is linked to breakdown in social cohesion, difficulties in finding employment, hunger, increased migration, drugs and drug trafficking, actions and inactions of the police, and the building of roads that allow strangers to enter communities easily. Poor people connect crime with decline in social community, with competitiveness and people looking out
only for themselves. While the well off have more to lose from theft, Jamaicans say that “crime and violence are experienced by poorer more than richer households.”

Rural communities in different countries especially fear theft of livestock, crops and vegetables. In some communities in Ethiopia women identify increasing livestock theft as the greatest risk to their security. They feel that if such theft is not curtailed, it will be increasingly difficult to deal with urgent needs in the usual way through the sale of livestock. For many poor families, theft of livestock is like having their savings account stolen. Crime and violence emerged as issues, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and Africa.

**Latin America and the Caribbean**

_One of the neighbors died and his wake was held not at his house but at a funeral home. When the family came back they returned to an empty house. The thieves took full advantage of the fact they weren't home and stole everything._

—Participant, discussion group of men and women, La Matanza, Argentina

_You have no control over anything, at any hour there could be a [gun] shot, especially at night._

—A young poor woman, Brazil

Poor people in the slums of Brazil have a pervasive sense of being exposed: “To live in a barraco is the same as living in the streets.” In Bode, poor people in slums link crime with the presence of the *marginals* (vagrants or street thugs) who are defined as “those who without thinking smoke crack and go out killing us....” People say, “The *marginals* are present in the everyday reality of the community...the life of the people is bothered by these underdogs, who are involved with drugs, gang fights, vandalism, and organized crime.”

In Brazilian urban slums, people express fear for their children and themselves. Drug use among children and teenagers and the absence of police control add to the problems. To change the situation, people want government action and police presence, as well as the development of solidarity and integration between people. Young men and women say that “people are like a dog...only protect their house...if outside the house someone is robbed or dead...nobody cares.”

In slums in Ecuador, although environmental insecurity and illegality are primary concerns, people also speak about runaway criminality in some areas. A group of adult men in Isla Trinitaria say, “There are gangs and delinquency and lack of protection by the police” and “there is absolutely no safety; there is no law and no police.”

Jamaicans define risk as being afraid or prone to harm. In Duckensfield people think the greatest risk is having the business stores robbed. People feel
that thieves operate from within the community and that houses that are not fenced are regularly robbed, and thefts, rapes and killings have increased. The situation in Duckensfield contrasts sharply with Accompong, however, where people in fact "feel safe and secure in the surroundings, walking freely at night and even leaving doors unlocked." Despite obvious poverty, "in times of trouble, people help each other, although both genders openly express disgust with the level of dependency and support required by the other gender. When crimes are committed, people say they can always identify the perpetrator. Disputes are settled quickly when they arise, with very little hard feelings on both parts. There is a record of only one murder since the community was established."

**Europe and Central Asia**

*In spring they stole the onions from my vegetable garden. I had just planted them; they hadn't even grown.*

—A poor woman, Belasovka, Russia

In Russia people report that as a result of lawlessness, organized crime, unemployment and extortion, poor people have to deal with theft and crime in their lives (see box 8.1).

In Novy Gorodok settlement in Western Siberia participants speak about increases in theft and criminality linked to increased drug trade. Roma men in Krasna Poliana, Bulgaria say, "Anything might be in store for you. What sort of security are you supposed to have when you never know if they'll cut off your power supply, if the skinheads will attack you, if you'll have supper for the children tonight?"

In the Kyrgyz Republic participants attribute the increase in crime to poverty. In the village of Bashi, they most frequently mention the theft of cattle and sheep, as meat commands high prices in town. People also report an increase in murders, which had once been rare. In Bashi, a group of poor men and women put it thus: "People are no longer surprised when someone kills his brother."

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**Box 8.1 Theft of Vegetables in Belasovka, Russia**

"They steal everything from our vegetable gardens; they dig up potatoes, garlic, tomatoes, carrots, marrow."

"They steal plastic sheets from bothouses and from garden beds."

"They steal piglets and chickens."

"We watched over our potatoes with a gun. People from other rooms pretend to come in pick mushrooms. They sprinkle a few mushrooms and some grass over the top of the basket, and underneath they have potatoes."
In countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia those who have done well economically are often identified as criminals. This was true of “new Russians,” whom poor people see as mafiosi. In Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina the only people who are perceived as doing well are the “mafiost” and the “war profiteers.” Older women mention “war plundering” of factories and industrial machines as an example of criminal activity.

**Africa**

*People can now rob you in broad daylight.*

—A discussion group participant in Kowerani
Masasa, Malawi

Although more acute in urban areas, even in rural areas of Africa, poor people report an increase in levels of theft. In rural Kowerani Masasa, Malawi all discussion groups emphasize that crime has worsened in the last two years. People say that the rise in crime is forcing people into poverty, “but we are very cooperative when one is attacked.” They define security as “chiteto, a household protecting itself from theft. The rich were better able to do this because they have the money to recruit security guards and build fences around their homes.” Crime includes acts of theft, robbery, burglary, murders and other acts that pose physical threats to people’s lives. All communities, except one rural village, report such acts.

In the Adaboya region in Ghana, men define crime as any act that makes another feel bad or hurt. They also define theft, adultery, incest and rape as crimes and think these crimes are increasing because “everybody is trying to get rich by foul or fair means.” Thefts focus on livestock, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, fowl, and sometimes money. Women say increasing theft of livestock has threatened their livestock rearing.

**Persecution by Police and Lack of Justice**

*Now even the police will rob you; you go in to report a crime and you come out feeling violated.*

—A 44-year-old woman, Dock Sud, Argentina

*When the police come here, it is to rob us...to humiliate everybody.*

—A discussion group participant,
Entra a Pulso, Brazil

*Imagine when we send these thieves to the police. We end up being disappointed to see them back the same day.*

—Participant, discussion group of poor men and women, Chitambi, Malawi
The police are an unfortunate necessity; they are transitory vigilantes; if you call them, they don’t come; they sleep and when you need them you have to pay a bribe.

—Participant, discussion group of men and women, Isla Trinitaria, Ecuador

Perhaps one of the most striking revelations of the study is the extent to which the police and official justice systems side with the rich, persecute poor people and make poor people more insecure, fearful, and poorer. Particularly in urban areas, poor people perceive the police not as upholding justice, peace and fairness, but as threats and sources of insecurity. Women report feeling vulnerable to sexual assault by police, and young men say they have been beaten up by the police without cause.

This negative experience is not universal. In some cases, the police support and help the poor. Poor people in parts of Africa give more examples of good performance and favorable evaluation than in other regions. In Ethiopia, participants (female students) say the presence of the police station protects the poor from thieves and helps maintain peace and order in the community. In Zambia groups often cite the police as an important institution, and the police are seen as providing protection from theft. The Victim Support Unit of the Zambia Police also receive positive remarks. In Manamalagasewa in Sri Lanka, poor people feel the police get along with the villagers, and preschool classes are held inside the police post.

Communities also report cases in which the relationship has changed from negative to positive. One such community is in Malawi. During the Mozambican war, the Police Mobile Forces Officers were stationed in the community to maintain peace and order as Mozambican refugees came in. According to the local people, many police came in and were accused of “victimizing innocent people, especially men, and raping women.” The community changed this by insisting that the policemen be replaced every month. Consequently, the police now are “helping catch thieves [and] thugs, guard market places, and help in loan recovery.” People say the police are doing a very good job.

Regional Patterns

The criminals have public safety; we do not.

—A woman, Sacadura Cabral, Brazil

Officers do not even care to talk...if they are not given money. If a poor man is beaten by a rich man and goes to file a case against the rich man, the officer concerned does not even register the case.

—A discussion group participant, Gowainghat, Bangladesh
Overall, participants report extraordinarily widespread evidence of corrupt, criminal, and sometimes brutal activities by the police, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and Eastern Europe. The range of reported behavior by the police includes being

- **Unresponsive**: Absent where needed, not coming when called or coming very late; only coming when someone has been killed.
- **Corrupt**: False arrest, accusation, and imprisonment, with release only on heavy payment; theft, including stealing money from children; bribes for documents or to register cases; lying; threats, blackmail, and extortion; demanding protection money; using drugs; and conniving with criminals and releasing them when arrested.
- **Brutal**: Harassing street vendors and other poor people; confiscating identity documents; raping women who go to police stations; beating up innocent people; torture; and murder; including killing street boys.

In Brazil poor people rate the police as the worst institution in 7 of the 10 urban communities. However, in the other three communities as well, experiences with the police have been negative. In Vila Junqueira a man says, "We do not have safety in the suburbs; the police show up only by chance." Others say the police refuse to come unless someone has been killed. In Entra a Pulso, when people in 6 of 10 discussion groups were asked which of the institutions needed to change, they picked the police.

Despite these low ratings, people say they desperately need police to provide a modicum of safety in neighborhoods. In response to mounting violence in one community, Bode, Brazil, people organized, collected money, built a police station on their own and invited the police to come and work from it. In November 1992 after great pressure, the police agreed to come, but they left in February 1993 because some marginais destroyed the police station.

In the slums of Brazil poor people cite the lack of protection from violence and crime as the most important reason for their vulnerability. An observation from Bode is typical: "The police don't do anything because they don't want to." Violence affects every aspect of life—schools, streets and the home. Numerous incidents are cited, coming from every community except one. A group of women in Sacadura Cabral say, "You see a lot of drugs around here. They kidnap and kill boys, 11–12 year olds." and "Once I was kept tied up for an hour. They stole a watch and a blouse to sell and buy drugs."

Poor people in Argentina consider police presence a blight, particularly in urban areas. In Dock Sud, a group of young males equate insecurity with police presence: "The police! If you think about it, the police are like the rubbish: it's everywhere. They come and pick you up for no reason. There have been several cases of police killing. The police kill; they are loose and we're
locked up.” While in Barrio Sol y Verde, a discussion group of men and women comment, “The police ask for money when you go to get a certificate. They demand that you give them what you have. The other day some children had to give them their travel money, and they had to walk all the way home.”

In Ecuador, based on discussions, the researchers concluded that the “military is more reliable than the police.”

In Jamaica, while poor people consider the police important, the police receive mixed reviews. In urban areas, they are rated negatively because of their inability to protect the innocent from criminals, and for violence, illicit fees, and beating of young men, who the police assume are “looking for trouble” when they are “looking for work.” Overall, poor people’s experiences can be summarized as “the police lie and steal from the poor.”

In Bangladesh, poor people distrust the police because the police are said to harass the poor and would never register a case without taking large bribes. In the slums of Dhaka they say, “The police always catch the innocent people instead of the guilty ones. They never come on time when incidents happen in the slum.” Chittagong slum-dwellers define vulnerability as “the failure to protect their young daughters from hoodlums as well as protect themselves both from the harassment of outsider hoodlums and police.”

In the state of Bihar in India poor people see the police as a constant threat to their livelihoods of foraging in forests or on railroad tracks or vending on the street. They also feel that the “menace” of the police has increased many times over. Reethi Devi of Patna has to pay a bribe to the railway police to collect coal dust on railroad tracks. Every sack of coal dust she brings home fetches Rs 40 after she kneads the coal dust into lumps of coal and takes the coal to the local factory. Her monthly income from this laborious effort is Rs 500 to Rs 800, from which she pays out money in bribes to the railway police. Box 8.2 summarizes conclusions based on the India study.

In Dangara, Uzbekistan poor people’s experiences with the police are summarized as “the police have become the rich people’s stick used against common people.”

Workers in Tashkent, Uzbekistan speak extensively about the humiliation and extortion they experience in their contacts with the police. Following the bomb explosions in February 1999, everyone now needs either temporary or permanent resident permits to work in Tashkent. This has become another opportunity for extortion. Migrants who come to work say the police take their passports to examine and then charge them with lack of papers, demand substantial sums of money to return the passports, or make them work for nothing in their bosses’ homes and treat them brutally.

With the Roma in Bulgaria the relationship with the police can go either way. In Filippovski, Sofia, Roma groups feel the main problem is lack of protection by the police. The Roma say that when they are attacked by skinheads, the police often beat up the Gypsies and let the skinheads go free. Police brutality against both Roma men and women is reported to be common. In Dimitrovgrad, however, the police and the Roma seem to have
Box 8.2 Police: A Licensed Evil?

In nearly all the communities visited in India, the poor lambaste the police service for its inefficiency, corruption and disruptive role in society. Vegetable vendors in Patna, for instance, say that there is a strong nexus between the police, contractors and criminals, who play a major role in impoverishment. It is common practice for the policemen to engage in harassment, extortion and blackmailing, and their threats prevent the poor from leading a peaceful life. Often the policemen apprehend people for petty reasons and set them free after charging unreasonable reasons.

Ali Ahmad, a tea shop owner in Patna, had to pay Rs 920 as a bribe to a policeman after he was detained and his shop and utensils seized. His wife had to borrow the amount at a very high interest rate from a neighbor for the bail. In most communities the police rate poorly in terms of efficiency and trust.

arrived at a peaceful coexistence, at least from the men's point of view. Of all institutions, the men rate the police the highest precisely because they are not playing out their punitive role: "The only respect Gypsies get is at the police station, because they know that people have no other chance and steal as a last resort. Only the police show some respect, no one else. If they decide to lock us away, then won't be a single one of us left." A young man says, "They know what we are [criminals] and understand us—we have nothing against them, and they don't have anything against us." Only women say, "They [police] are all in the game. If an innocent person becomes a victim, they won't come and help because they're guarding those other guys..."

In Russia reports of harassment by the police and of the police and criminals working together are widespread. Older people complain that they do not feel protected by the police. Young boys in several places report cases where the police persecuted them: "They take us into the cell on any pretext or without, to show their bosses they are active in arresting hooligans."

Insecurity in the face of police is often heightened by legal status. The informal livelihoods of poor people often make them vulnerable, being either illegal or on the fringes of the law. Lack of tenure rights to the land where they live is perhaps an even more acute and very common insecurity. Let a woman in Brazil have the last word:

When a government official comes here and says that we have to leave the area, I freak out. I gather my things...but don't know where to go... I don't know if I should take my sons out of school...if I should pack food so that we don't run out of food on the road... I feel insecure, lost. At this moment, it is just God and me.
Civil Conflict and War

When we fled our homes, we left everything that was of value, all the things that we had worked all our lives to have, to build a home.

—A woman, Bijeljina, Bosnia and Herzegovina

I fled to Ethiopian refugee camps with my family... where we experienced incredible problems—we faced bad health, malnutrition, and lack of income. Something we will never forget for the rest of our lives. We returned to Yo'ub-Yabook with empty hands.

—An old man, Somaliland

Due to the war situations people left for Chavakacheri and Vanni areas in 1995. Due to the war about 20 percent of the houses were totally destroyed and damaged.

—Research team, Jaffna, Sri Lanka

While almost everyone pays the price for war, it wreaks havoc and further adds to the insecurity poor people face. Four of the countries in which the study took place—Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Somaliland and Sri Lanka—have experienced recent civil conflict and war. In all these countries discussion groups state that civil conflict destroys the basis for livelihoods and makes it harder to rebuild lives.

In Somaliland most groups speak about how conflicts cause insecurity. People define security as “when an individual, family or community has no fear for their lives, property or their dignity.” Old men in Dagaar, Somaliland say security is the key to prosperity: “If there is security, there is no fear; people can go wherever there is a market for their produce; transport trucks can cross all boundaries, and there is no fear of land mines.” Poor people attribute many of the current problems of poor markets for produce and animals, bad roads, and the poor production to past instability. In the post-conflict situation, though, they say social and political conditions have improved. In Qoyta village people say neighboring clans have settled conflicts, and bonds between families in the village have strengthened. The immense destruction of infrastructure, including water supplies, however, continues to make survival difficult.

In Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina people note that in the past, almost everyone was comfortable and middle class. On returning to their homes after the war, person after person faced destitution: “I knew that we wouldn’t find our furniture, but I didn’t expect that there wouldn’t be a bathtub, tiles, or light switches.”

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the most vulnerable groups emerging from the war are widows and children who lack networks and protection. In Vares, Bosnia and Herzegovina a young Croat woman speaks for many when
she cries, "I am a displaced person in my own city. I don’t have anyone left here. I never married, so I am completely alone. Anyway, I don’t care about me. What upsets me is the way I see young people having to live. I was born here and I will die here. I am just counting the days."

Similarly, in the civil conflict in Sri Lanka the Tamil minority faces great insecurity. In one community people say, “Tamils were restricted. They were not in a position to take their fish to Colombo and sell them, due to the fact that vehicles they travel in were subjected to inspection frequently. Moreover, there were times when the newly formed fishermen’s group requested the army to detain such fish lorries purposely so that the fish would get spoilt. In view of the above situation they mostly sell their catch of fish in the local market itself.” Many Tamil families have slid into poverty from interrelated processes triggered by the ethnic conflict, particularly harassment by gangs, injury and fear of land mines, increase in transportation costs because of loss of bicycles and carts, the breakdown of the smallholder agricultural economy, and government restrictions on economic activity.

The fear of war, the memory of loss, and the difficulties in recovery emerge in Ethiopia as well, which at the time of the study was not engaged in any war. In Kebelle 11, Ethiopia participants say that during war, “we will be asked to contribute money, our children go the war front and die rather than helping us.” Another woman in Somaliland says, “Peace is the mother of the good life.”

Macropolicy Stresses and Shocks

Before I had secure work and money was worth more. Now I cannot afford anything.
—A participant, discussion group of poor men, La Matanza, Argentina

Poor people experience macropolicy-induced shocks as sources of insecurity and material poverty, including loss of employment and sources of livelihood; increased prices of food, other basic necessities and agricultural inputs; and decreases in prices paid for agricultural and other produce. Poor people are usually hit not just by one of these trends, but by combinations of them, and the combinations vary by region, country and community. Poor people discuss the effects of debt and exchange rate adjustment, market liberalization and privatization.

Debt, Exchange Rate Adjustment, and Factory Closures

Our currency has lost power; it was strong in the past.
—Participant, discussion group of men and women, Madana Village, Malawi

Participants in Argentina and Ecuador talk about insecurities created by external national debt, economic instability and hyperinflation. A group of
young women in Chota, Ecuador agree: “Poverty affects us all because of the
government debt to foreigners... then the rise in fuel prices makes fares and
product prices rise... we sell cheap, but it's only enough to pay for the trans-
port.” In addition to pointing to income inequality and absence of social
policies, poor people in Morro da Conceição, Brazil say, “the government is
ruining everything to pay agiota [loan sharks].”

In Russia the impact of currency devaluation is so sharp that people use
the date “August 17, 1998,” as the marker in talking about life. In various
parts of Russia, referring to August 17, people speak about the “uncon-
trollable surge of prices,” the low salaries, unpaid and delayed salaries, and
they say, “We were fooled again.” An older woman pensioner in
Ekaterinburg, Russia reports that after the August 17 devaluation, she
could no longer survive on her pension. She survived by picking berries and
mushrooms in the summer.

Another woman from Ekaterinburg describes her hardships as follows:

According to Tania, after the 17 August crisis, her husband
has been making less money, and his earnings continue
to go down. Although he is paid his salary every week,
sometimes they don't have any money at all. Tania’s family
also gives them some financial support. Her parents own
a house and have a plot of land where they grow some fruit
and vegetables. They help Tania with food and her grand-
parents help with money. Tania also gets some money from
“sponsors.”

Indonesia and Thailand shared the regional financial crisis of 1997,
which took place after 10 years of improving economic conditions. The cri-
sis dragged many back down into poverty. In speaking about communitywide
shocks, for example, discussion groups from Harapan Jaya, Indonesia men-
tion large-scale layoffs by industrial and construction companies and sharp
rises in prices of basic goods stemming from the prolonged economic crisis
(box 8.3).

Market Liberalization

Market liberalization hits poor people in countries with diverse conditions
and economies. Lack of protection from cheaper imports undermines local
production. In Jamaica, a woman in Freeman's Hall remarks that she has dif-
ficulty selling her chickens because “people now would rather buy chicken
from foreign lands,” and if she lowers her prices to match the imports she
will sustain a loss.

In Bulgaria pensioners blame the West, which they see as “forcing on
Bulgaria closure of enterprises, the ruin of agriculture, and absence of pro-
tectionist policies.” Several middle-aged and elderly participants interpret
competition from cheap European and Turkish imports as a grand Western
conspiracy against Bulgaria: “They forced us to liquidate our cooperative
Box 8.3 The Impact of Economic Crisis: An Old Man and an Old Woman, Indonesia

Participants in Pegambaran, a coastal urban community in Indonesia, believed that their economic condition had been improving over the past 10 years, but the crisis reversed this trend. Before, the availability of goods was limited, now they are available, but prices are very high. Many have lost their jobs. Many have been forced back into poverty. Those in the middle- and lower-income groups are the hardest hit.

The economic crisis has greatly affected Pak Suji’s life. An old man, he was already badly off. Before, with an income of Rp 3,000 per day, he could buy 2 kilograms of rice at Rp 1,000 per kilogram and other daily needs, such as side dishes, cooking oil and sugar. Now, after the crisis, with his fixed income and a rice price that has gone up to Rp 2,500 per kilogram, he can no longer afford to buy enough rice, let alone a side dish and meet other daily needs.

But Katiyem, also elderly, admits she was very panicked when the prices of all basic essentials went up because of the economic crisis. She had headaches and could not sleep because of it. All she could do at that time was borrow money from neighbors and return it when she could. Her children could not do much since they were not rich themselves and were experiencing exactly the same thing.

farms in order to sell their produce cheap; now they are closing down the enterprises in order to force us to buy their goods.” “All the markets are glutted with cheap Turkish goods,” says a mixed group in Bulgaria.

At a personal level, people in countries of the former Soviet Union feel that they cannot easily recoup and adapt to the mentality and requirements of a market-dominated economy. People feel that it is very difficult to adapt to wildly fluctuating prices of agricultural produce and no guarantee of either prices or buyers.

Restrictions on international trade can affect poor people’s livelihoods very directly. In Somaliland numerous study participants mention the widespread hardships created by the disease-related ban on Somaliland’s major export goods—sheep and goats—to the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

Two other important macroeconomic stresses have been the removal of subsidies, particularly on agricultural inputs, and the dismantling of government-run cooperatives. A typical example comes from the life history of Thomas, an ex-miner and farmer living in Muchinha in Zambia. After leaving the mines he returned to farming maize; with money saved he could afford to buy fertilizer and seed. Things began to get difficult in 1994, though, when agricultural policies were reformed. “Because we cannot afford fertilizer we are now concentrating on growing millet, sorghum, and cassava,” he says.
Privatization

In many parts of the world poor people speak about the negative impacts of massive privatization. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia privatization without accountable institutions is seen as leading to mass fraud. "The politicians are either incompetent or corrupt or both," says a youth from Sofia, Bulgaria. Many poor people express concerns with the lack of investment in national industry and technology, lack of industrial machinery and equipment, lack of inputs for agriculture and erratic payment of wages. In the face of broader economic hardships, participants across the region also speak bitterly about the loss of social programs and "a state that does not take care of its citizens."

An older woman from Sofia, Bulgaria who took part in the first wave of voucher divestment says,

Privatization comes in two forms: vouchers and cash. The prices are set by those who have money. That is, by the mafiosi. This is how money's laundered. We have been paid ridiculous dividends by the privatization funds in which we are shareholders. That's why we're not taking part in the present wave of mass privatization. In general, privatization is a gold mine for a handful of people.

Poor people often identify a combination of factors as contributing to poverty. Both in Ethiopia and Nigeria they speak about the ripple effect through local economies of reducing government employees, demobilizing soldiers and dismantling cooperatives; high inflation combined with loss of civil service jobs means that many people no longer have the capacity to purchase local goods and, to survive, they start growing vegetables and other crops themselves. According to discussion groups in Ayekale Odoogun, Nigeria,

The local people produce a lot of farm products such as gaari [processed cassava], but there is very little market for these farm products. As governmental workers' salaries became inadequate, many of the workers have become part-time farmers. The effect of this is that those who used to buy farm produce locally in the past have become emergency farmers.

Social Vulnerability

To feel all right—well, you need to eat three times a day; not to overeat, but just not to be hungry. To have decent shoes and trousers, so as not to be ashamed when you go to the street. To have a tape recorder. To have a drink with some friends and to
feel easy. To have good children who could find a decent job, who could marry and have their own children.

—Participants, discussion group of middle-aged Roma men, Etropole, Bulgaria

Social vulnerability stems from insecurities related to social status resulting in exclusion, discrimination and lack of protection. Examples include the sudden destitution and stigma of widowhood for women, the hardships created by divorce and dowry, vulnerability of the elderly, the discrimination and harassment experienced by minority groups, and the exclusion resulting from the breakdown of social ties.

In some African and Asian cultures, widowhood can be a devastating shock: its adverse social and economic consequences are irreversible, and they affect not only the widow, but also her children. Relatives are known to come and seize the family’s possessions, leaving the widow and her children with almost nothing (box 8.4). In Ecuador discussion groups report that widows and single mothers are victims of the most disrespect and violence.

**Box 8.4 Widowhood Leads to Destitution: Bangladesh and Zambia**

In Bangladesh, Mantua came from a relatively well-off family. She was given in marriage at the age of 12 to a man aged 50. After nine years of the marriage he died. At that time she was pregnant and already had a 2-year-old child. After the birth of the second child, the elder brother of her husband grabbed all her property and turned her out of her house. She took shelter with a neighbor and worked in the neighbor’s house for food. She agitated with other landless people to obtain land but could not because she did not have an adult male in her family. Now she is 65; her elder son dead from small pox and her younger son mentally disabled. She says, “I have already forgotten the feelings of happiness.”

In Zambia, Mary is a widow with five children. When her husband died in 1998, his relatives grabbed the family’s possessions; including the furniture, her husband’s sewing machines (he used to be a tailor) and his bank book. Mary was left with nothing but her children—not even pocket money. She was told by her father-in-law to leave the house with her children, and only come back when she had bought white material and three white chickens so that they could clean her according to tradition. Luckily, her husband’s friend drove her to her village with her children. And now she has too many things to worry about her parents are very old and poor; her two children were sent back from school because she could not pay. According to Mary they had not eaten the previous day because she did not sell her dress. There was no sign that they were going to have anything for lunch. Her children were feeding on unripe mangoes.
Women are also vulnerable to discrimination through divorce and dowry. In Malawi divorce was identified by women’s discussion groups from three sites as a shock specific to women. In Bangladesh and India dowry makes unmarried females a liability. In Bangladesh “if a daughter is not married in time, the parents run a risk of being stigmatized and the girls a risk of being violated.” A father in Bangladesh with three daughters (and no sons who might have brought in dowry), explained that to start marrying off his daughters he sold his cow and goats, the only valuable assets of his household. He was left very poor and acutely anxious:

> If I die there is no one to marry off my youngest daughter. I do not know whether I will be able to get food tomorrow. I do not see any light of hope. If anybody provides me with a piece of land and my wife with a job then we will be able to survive. I have no son and no land. Those who have sons and land feel secure and happy in the society. If they fall in any sudden difficulties they can overcome the situation quickly.

Insecurity and anxiety come from knowing that the high expenditures of marriage will have to be met or children and their families face a bleak future. While in Bangladesh and India this is dowry for daughters, for Karakalpak people in Uzbekistan it is bridewealth or qudlym for sons. The size of the qudlym “is always at the very limit of the maximum financial ability of the groom’s family.” A father in Uzbekistan confides, “As you may see, I have helped all my children to get married, and now I live without anything, sitting on the floor. I gave up everything and gave it all to their families.”

Socially, old age is increasingly a painful and lonely crisis for many poor people. Economic pressures are fraying the traditional family care of the elderly in many parts of the world. In Bangladesh security for old women was linked to a son’s not severing his family bonds after marriage and still providing food for his mother. In Vietnam, Mr. D, 57 years old, is slowly but surely sliding into poverty as his strength to work his small bit of land declines and illness takes over. In Beda, Egypt isolation and the three miles to the post office, where meager pensions must be collected, results often in a “death trek” toward the end of every month. A group of men remark, “Come on the 20th or 24th of the month, and you see the problems of the elderly. When they go to get their pensions, you see them walking on their hands and feet. The way is long and painful...people walk a little, sit a little, and there are three death cases on this road annually among the elderly.” Similarly, in Cassava Piece in Jamaica, a woman states, “there are many elderly persons in the community who are unable to help themselves. One per month the government’s poor relief officer could visit them.” In Todgha, Somaliland, older men say that they have to walk longer distances and do more work because their teenage children “abandoned rural life and left them behind in the range lands.”
Social discrimination not only decreases opportunities, but increases insecurities through threats, abuse and violence. Indigenous peasants in the rural highlands of Cañar, Ecuador fear attacks when they travel into towns. In La Calera, until recently, Indians, especially the elderly, were not allowed on buses because “they said they carried diseases.” In the Amazon settlements of Voluntad de Dios and 10 de Agosto, Quijos Indians report both physical attacks and attempts to usurp their lands. Racism against blacks is summarized as “when you see a black man running, you are looking at a thief.”

Economic stress places a heavy burden on family and community relations. Security means participating in community affairs, voicing opinions and being respected in society. Inability to follow community norms and participate in community affairs leads to exclusion. These effects are particularly striking in reports from the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region. In the town of Etropole, Bulgaria the combined effect of poverty and crime has led to “estrangement,” or people “behaving like savages.” “Going backwards in time,” the return to subsistence agriculture as a means of survival for people who have lived in towns, has taken a devastating toll on the human psyche. “All day among animals—you become like them, you cannot speak normally anymore,” states a middle-aged man from Etropole, Bulgaria.

Tensions created by money difficulties are reflected in relationships. People speak about quarrels within families, brothers and sisters quarreling and cutting each other off as everyone scrambles to stay alive. A youth in Plovdiv, Bulgaria says, “My parents died, and I left my share of the family lands to my sister to look after them. Once or twice I go to my native village to see her and to take some victuals. She is giving me less and less: lard instead of meat, some potatoes, some cabbage—cheap and heavy things, difficult to carry. She has started to look at me as if I am a drone.”

The breakdown of social relationships extends to friends and colleagues as well. Says a man in a discussion group of unemployed men from Plovdiv, “I meet sometimes with my friends. We all have our problems, everybody is facing difficulties. How could I ask them for anything? We share our problems, we exchange news on the family, and everybody goes in different directions. Sometimes I meet an old friend who I know is doing well, but he starts from the beginning explaining how serious are the difficulties he is facing just now. And later I stop seeing him—he is visiting different places, he is talking to different people. Well, we are still friends but I know I can ask him for only one thing—so I would prefer to bother him with something that is really important.”

In the village of Belasovka, Russia people describe the dominant emotional tone as “everyone is on their own now; the poor envy the rich and the rich scorn the poor; we don’t visit friends as often as we used to; people are hostile and alone.”
Health, Illness and Death

You can get good treatment but only with money.
—A resident of Ivanovo, Russia

Poor health, illness and death can impoverish people and they are a major source of insecurity and anxiety (chapter 5). At a blow, the body can flip from asset to liability, incurring heavy costs for treatment and having to be cared for and fed. Deaths can impoverish decisively, both from losing the labor of the deceased and, where custom requires, from costly funeral rites (see box 8.5). In the Naryn region of the Kyrgyz Republic, at least one horse must be butchered at a funeral ceremony. A 56-year old woman explains that failure to do this is viewed as a disgrace, so poor people will borrow heavily to buy a horse, and then have difficulty repaying. In a Bangladeshi case, when a husband died, his two widows sold a third of the land he had left in order to perform his last rites. Across the 10 sites in Malawi, deaths and funerals were, after hunger, the most commonly named shocks; and the poor suffer more because they have to think how to borrow money for the coffin and then how to repay.

Box 8.5 The Cost of a Funeral, Kyrgyz Republic

A 53-year-old woman in Kenesh, Kyrgyz Republic says, "Tomorrow's the funeral of my eldest daughter's mother-in-law. We have to contribute at least 500 som and a good carpet to be hung on a wall. I have neither, so I borrowed 300 som from a neighbor. My daughter-in-law borrowed a carpet for the floor, but relatives told me that it won't do, so I had to take another: better carpet, which costs 500 som—so that my contribution is like everybody else's. I'll have to repay these debts, eventually, but I don't know how. Many people don't lend us anymore, because they know we have nothing to repay the debt with. See, it's difficult for the poor to maintain the links with the relatives."

In Search of Security

The wealthy can recover losses in one year, but the poor, who have no money, will never recover.
—A resident of Ha Tinh, Vietnam

Misfortune and disasters can strike at the rich, but the rich are less vulnerable. In the words of a participant in Egypt, "The one who is untroubled is the rich and his mood is serene." Poor people are vulnerable in many ways: their work and livelihoods are more at risk; they live in the most insecure areas, their assets are the most insecure, their housing is the most liable to damage, they have the least with which to protect themselves,
they suffer most from crime, they are most at the mercy of the police, their rights are the least secure, and they struggle most to meet their social obligations. To make things worse, diminishing social cohesion and strained social relations are tending to reduce mutual social supports. Overall, the evidence indicates, poor people are becoming more insecure.

For those with little, small shocks have big effects on wellbeing. Setbacks are also harder or impossible to reverse. Reducing poverty requires searching for ways to avoid or mitigate the effects of loss of work and livelihood, natural and human-made disaster, civil disorder, crime and violence, persecution by police and justice, macroeconomic shocks, social vulnerability and illness and death. Insecurity has many causes and interventions need to take them into account. Confronting these in antipoverty terms may be highly cost-effective. It may be cheaper and easier to prevent poor people becoming poorer through shocks and insecurity than it is, once they are poorer, to enable them to claw their way back up again.

As we have seen, though, security as a characteristic of wellbeing is more than material. It is also peace of mind, social harmony, good relations with others, and mutual support. A remark from a group of women in Egypt touches on these reciprocities. They say, “Security is to have someone to care about and someone to take care of.” In Bosnia and Herzegovina a young man says, “I would like for people of all ethnicities to accept Bosnia and Herzegovina as their homeland, their state, and for all to live in peace. For all to look for ways to prosper and live better, and not to live to spite each other because someone is a Croat or a Bosniac or a Serb.”

We are left with questions:

How can the anxiety and fear of poor women and men be diminished and their peace of mind enhanced?

How can justice and police protection be provided for poor men and women?

How can the shocks that strike them be prevented, removed or reduced?

How can poor people be helped to become more resilient and better able to cope?

How can macro-policy changes be informed by poor people’s realities?

What has to happen so that poor children, women and men can feel secure, be physically safe and be socially included?
Notes

Discussions on security, vulnerability and risk were held in small groups with men and women. These issues were raised following discussions on wellbeing and ill-being and after sketching out linkages between the causes and impacts of poverty. Invariably these issues emerged as part of overall discussions of wellbeing and ill-being. In addition researchers were encouraged to explore the following issues: How do people define security? How do people differentiate between secure and insecure households? What makes households insecure and why? Has security increased or decreased? Are some people better able to cope with sudden shocks to sources of livelihoods?